

N.S.E.

A Penny a Story

# The Black Cat

FOR SEPTEMBER

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# The Black Cat

## The Making of the Fourth League

BY LEWIS ALLEN

*How an ingenious crook was foiled by the timely intervention of a "fair one" in his attempt to form a fake ball league, and thereby gain possession of an unsuspecting Klondiker's "pile," proves the old adage, "He laughs best who laughs last."*



LUCKY BRACKLIN was coming East. Everybody knew it from the Klondike to Broadway. The Saskulask brass band had inharmoniously proclaimed his departure and golden eagles marked his progress; each seeming larger and gaining in importance as the coast faded and the effete East, the East of blasé Broadway, loomed up along the trail of the "Daphne," his private car.

Everybody knew of Bracklin, knew of the avalanche of pure luck that had heaped mammoth nuggets of virgin gold round about him, but only one man in all Broadway really knew "Lucky" Bracklin personally—"Chet" Corrigan, his pal of Goldfield gambling days.

"On my way to your settlement to do Broadway and to see real baseball," Bracklin had wired Corrigan from Seattle.

Corrigan read and re-read this wire. Then he turned to the newspapers and read and re-read the stories of Lucky Bracklin, whose fortune was variously estimated at

anywhere from a million to a billion or so—depending upon the imagination of the telegraph editor. Result: many sleepless nights while awaiting his coming, planning big plans and scheming gigantic schemes.

Chet could use any quantity of that Klondike gold to very good personal advantage.

The Twentieth Century Limited that carried Bracklin eastward was a snail in Chet's opinion.

Traveling private had soon palled upon the active mind of the Klondiker. After leaving Buffalo he wandered for the twentieth time into the regular train.

"What are you going to do in New York, Mr. Bracklin?" asked the friendly conductor.

"Two things, friend, two things. First off I'm goin' to hit the trail up and down Broadway so swift that all the natives will run out of their shacks to see me go by; the second, baseball. I ain't seen a good game of baseball for near fifteen years. Every six months or so, we used to get a few newspapers up to Saskulask and I'd read about the games. I tried to get up a team among the



half-breeds. I made a good ball out of some old socks and a piece of leather, but every time I tried to teach any of 'em to catch it they'd run away, and when I hewed out a bat and tried to teach 'em to throw the ball to me, none of them dast do it for fear I'd shoot 'em. Yes sir, I'm sure goin' to see some real baseball."

"You'll see plenty of good baseball if you want to, Mr. Bracklin, but don't try to tear up Broadway street—at least, not with that outfit. They may think Buffalo Bill's in town. Don't be offended——"

"No offense at all, friend. That's just what I wanted to hear. I'll get the right kind of clothes before I've been in the big town forty-eight hours. Tell me, what's the best durned hotel?"

"The Greater Grand," the conductor informed him without hesitation.

"Friend!" exclaimed Bracklin, shaking the conductor's hand, "you come up to the Greater Grand any time after next week and you won't know me."

There was every evidence of sincerity in the conductor's promise.

At Harmon, where the electric engines are put on, one of the road officials hopped aboard to learn Mr. Bracklin's pleasure as to the disposal of the Daphne.

"Is your stay in New York to be long, Mr. Bracklin?" asked the official.

"You got me. It all depends. If I don't like the way the village is run or if I don't get to see enough baseball, I may beat it right back to Saskulask. You see, I still got

a few pretty good bets up there."

"Then, of course, you prefer to have your car where you may get it at a few hours' notice."

"Just the idea, friend. That's what I want."

The official smiled, not at Mr. Bracklin, but reminiscently, of others who had come to Broadway.

When Bracklin wandered out into the maze at Grand Central, he was dazed for a moment, but the onslaught of taxi-barkers awoke him to action.

"Take me to the Greater Grand Hotel, young feller," he ordered, and climbed into the nearest taxi. He was whirled two blocks east, two blocks west, and then to the Greater Grand. Even then but a few minutes had elapsed.

"Eighty cents."

"Buy yourself a new buggy, young feller," Bracklin said laughingly, thrusting a bright eagle into the chauffeur's outstretched hand. "You fellers work too cheap here in this berg."

One second before he had registered, there was absolutely no interest shown in the arrival of James J. Bracklin. Four minutes and a half after he had scrawled "J. J. Bracklin, Saskulask," across the page, the head clerk, the room clerk, the bookkeeper, the assistant clerk, the assistant manager and three bell-boys were flocking about Bracklin's room, making obeisance and suffusing their expectant countenances with ingratiating smiles.

"Chuck that in the iron box for me," he ordered the assistant manager, tossing him a package from the inside pocket of his flapping frock



coat. "There's a hundred of 'em—all thousands—I don't like paper money, anyway."

All this on a beautiful June morning, and as the functionaries at the Greater Grand dispersed, the clock hand indicated 11.45 A.M.

"I'll wash up a bit, I reckon," said Bracklin. The chief bell-boy and two assistants rushed to turn on the hot water and get towels ready. Fifteen minutes later, Bracklin was downstairs again, wandering about the gilt-arched foyer, while many were secretly pointing him out and whispering, "that's Lucky Bracklin, the chap who found a solid gold mountain up in Alaska."

At the telephone desk, the operator, a big-eyed blonde girl, with a curl over her left eye, lowered "Violetta the Forsaken," turned down the corner of the page, and watched him with cool interest.

"Sis," said Bracklin, sweeping off his felt hat, "do you reckon Chet Corrigan's name is in that book?" pointing his thumb at the telephone book.

"Reckon it——" The girl was going to tell him to reckon it out for himself, but she could see that Bracklin was neither fresh nor lazy, and she changed her mind.

"I suppose that Chet stands for Chester?" she asked, turning to the C's in the telephone book.

"Wouldn't bet on it, tho' I knew Chet Corrigan for some years a spell ago, and I never heard him called anything but Chet. I want him to pilot me up to the ball park. I don't suppose you happen to know if there's a game today?"

The big-eyed blonde girl looked at

him in amazement for a moment. Could it be possible that any one in this enlightened age was ignorant of the fact that a baseball game *was* to be played in New York today?

"Sure; the Giants——"

"Thunderation! I want to see *white* men play ball. Ain't them Cuban Giants dead yet?"

The big-eyed blonde girl stared, though the color suffused her cheeks.

"Don't kid me," and she dropped the 'phone book with a bang.

Simultaneously a man rushed across the corridor.

"Jim Bracklin! I'll be——"

The Klondiker wheeled, to see a dapper little man of about forty grinning like an Eskimo and grasping his hand.

"Chet Corrigan, you little cuss, how'd you know where I was at?"

"Knew you'd make for the swellest place in town, and so I've been laying for you. Didn't want anyone to get in and sell you any fake gold mine stock."

Chet grinned happily as Bracklin turned to the telephone girl.

"Thought I was kiddin', eh? Well, Sis, seein' as how I beat you to findin' Chet, you needn't hunt, here——" and slapping a gold eagle on the desk he walked away, toward the café.

The big-eyed blonde girl blinked at the golden coin. "Cuban Giants—well, he'll be buying mining stock, sure!"

At the bar, the Goldfield days had a brief inning. Bracklin was thinking about the game. He wouldn't listen to any other talk.

"We'll chew over those ghosts tomorrow; I want to see a good game



of real ball—and the good old boys.”

It was the last day of the World Series and Chet was thinking rapidly. Lucky Jim had too much ready money to pass him around promiscuously, that was a cinch. He must pocket him until all the big ones got out of town. It wouldn't do to let him jump right into a big league game and then tell him that was the end. Suddenly a big idea was born in the gambler's head. It was so big that it almost cracked his cranium to hold it in.

“Say, Jim, suppose you want to unpack your togs——”

“Togs? I want to pack 'em up and get rigged out in some regular clothes. Lead me to a real place and I'll buy up a weddin' outfit. I must be right when I go to the ball game.”

Corrigan breathed easier. It couldn't be said that he kept him away from the big game, and so the pair went on a tour of investment, Corrigan nursing his big idea, and Lucky Bracklin buying everything that met his fancy.

Twenty-four hours worked wondrous changes. It was a different appearing Bracklin, sartorially, from the one who arrived in his private car “Dap-hah-nee.” Bracklin wore a suit of shepherd's plaid, a large horse-shoe diamond adorned his tango-red tie, gray spats hugged the uppers of his omelette-hued shoes, and he leaned back in his silken shirt sleeves, in a red morocco chair, in the suite de luxe at the Greater Grand. With his index finger, the warped nail of which a manicurist had failed to civilize, he laboriously followed the sporting page.

Chet Corrigan paced the room in

deep thought. While Bracklin yearned to see real baseball, Corrigan yearned for the big idea,—the idea that would waft speedily but painlessly, a large section of Bracklin's riches into his itching palm.

“Say, Chet,” exclaimed the Klondiker, his brows furrowed in thought, as he looked up from the paper, “this here Mathewson, and Chase, and Wilson, whoever heard of them? What I want to know is where's all the *real* baseball players? You know who I mean, old Charlie Radbourne, Buck Ewing, Charlie Bennett, and them fellers?”

Chet Corrigan was looking affectionately at Bracklin. The big idea was becoming simple.

“How about old Pop Anson, and Jim McCormick; yes, and Jimmie Galvin; and say, how about King Kelly, you know,—good old ‘Slide-Kelly-Slide’? Them was the ball players who *could* play ball, not these young kids no one ever heard about. Say, Chet, what has become of 'em?”

The smile on Corrigan's face was sweet to see. He drew up a chair and seated himself in front of Bracklin, the big idea flowering.

“I'll tell you Jim, you've always been square and I hate crooked business like an Injun hates water. I might as well tell you the truth; we're pretty much ashamed of conditions, but what can we do?”

“Well, dig into it, Chet.”

“It's like this,” and Corrigan looked truly grieved. “All them good old-time baseball players are simply crazy to get into the game again.”

“Why in thunder don't they? Anybody with sense enough to wear his



hat on his head would be mighty glad to see 'em play."

"Sure, Jim, but to tell you the truth, they're up against a pretty rotten deal. They're froze out, every single one of 'em."

"Froze out? What in Halifax do you mean, Chet?"

Corrigan straightened up, rested his index finger in the palm of his right hand and proceeded to explain.

"Of course Jim, when I come to remember, it's natural you wouldn't know about this, being up in the Klondike ten years or more, and so I'm going to tell you just what a rotten deal the good old-time players have been getting since the trust deal. When I said they were froze out I was telling you the exact truth. You know they had a couple leagues, the Americans and the Nationals. Well, sir, those two leagues proved to be nothing more than a big baseball trust. Why, John D. and his oil, is a piking, non-competitive little cross-roads merchant compared to the baseball situation today, when it comes to the Czar business."

"'Base-ball trust'? Never heard of such a thing, and besides, even if there was, they just naturally tie up the big cards. Why——"

"You don't understand," said Chet softly; "'t's like this, Jim. We used to buy meat at twelve cents a pound. It was mighty good meat, too. You remember it. Then the trust got hold of it and what do we pay today? I'll tell you; we pay about thirty cents a pound for it and it's mighty poor stuff at that. That's what a trust does. Just now they've started up another league—the Federals,

That makes three of 'em, and they've got baseball tied up so tight that you can't move a finger. Look here, Jim, why should these baseball magnates hire such high-priced men as Charlie Radbourne or Buck Ewing, or Casey or Kelly?"

"So's I'd come East to see some real baseball."

"Why should they hire such high-priced fellows as them," continued Chet, now letting out the line. "These baseball magnates have tied up everything. They own all the baseball grounds and they control all the players that they want to control, and let me tell you, they don't care a continental hoot for *baseball*. They're in it for the good old long green and nothing else, and they've got it tied up so tight that they can work these young kids, and you got to see them or nothing."

"Do you mean to tell me that the people stand for shuttin' out Kelly, Galvin and all the good ones?"

"What can they do?" There was a deep sorrow in Corrigan's tone.

"Do? Why, you little pin-head,—start a baseball league of their own, these fellers like you, that are wise to this crooked business."

Corrigan shook his head in deep gloom; in fact, he seemed about to burst into tears.

"What's to hinder?"

Corrigan sighed and sat down again. "That's all right for a guy like you to talk like that, but it costs too much money, Jim."

"Does it?" asked Bracklin, looking disappointed.

"Oh, take a lucky guy like you," Corrigan explained hastily, "and it



would be a cinch,—a regular pastime; you'd be having all the fun and making a bushel of money. You see, we fellows who know how this baseball trust is putting it over on us, would go ahead and form a league in a minute if we could afford it, and there'd be a big fortune in it. You don't stop to think, you big lucky cuss, that none of us has been wheeling a barrel of solid gold nuggets into his woodshed every night for ten years." Corrigan stood up, faced Bracklin very impressively and, as he spoke, pounded the palm of his right hand with his clenched fist.

(It was very evident that the bobbin was disappearing.)

"If I had one thousandth of your coin, Jim Bracklin, I'd make these baseball magnates the sickest bunch of boobs in the world. I'd have a league that would stretch across the country. I'd have schedules for every city, and I'd have all the real players in that league, none of your young bean-bag tossers, but the real old boys who used to pound out home runs every inning and keep the grandstand and bleachers in an uproar from beginning to end!" Corrigan waxed more and more enthusiastic.

(The bobbin went under the surface.)

"You know what I'd do, Jim Bracklin? I'd take Pop Anson, and Jim McCormick, and Jimmie Galvin, and Kelly, and Casey, and Charlie Bennett, and Buck Ewing, and Charlie Radbourne, and a dozen others of them good old-timers, and I'd divide them up and scatter 'em around through the different teams, so that every day throughout the ball season,

in every city, all the fans would have a chance of seeing not only the real old genuine baseball, but two or three of them good old fellers who've been crowded out by the trusts."

(A complete launching of the great idea.)

Corrigan wiped his perspiring brow. Then he took a deep breath and continued:

"Think of it, Jim! Think of the excitement that would make! Think of the hundreds of thousands just like you and me, who would fight to get into the game; and say, wouldn't it make these baseball trust fellers sick?"

Bracklin stared at Corrigan with admiration and then grabbed him by the hand so hard, it was only by gritting his teeth that Corrigan suppressed a howl.

"That's the eye, old hoss!" exclaimed Bracklin. "Glad to see you've woke up. I've been trying to explain to you that I come on East chiefly to see some baseball, and all you've done was to chase me round to tailor shops puttin' me next to style."

"We're pretty much ashamed of it, us real sports," said Corrigan sadly, "and we don't talk much about it for reasons you can understand. Of course I had to tell you and I'm sorry you came all the way from Klondike only to find out that you can't see real good baseball any more. Of course you understand now that we fellers, the good old sports who love clean fast baseball, can't lift a hand on account of the trusts."

Corrigan watched Bracklin narrowly.



(The line was stretching out.)

"What'd that league cost?" The words were the thundering command of the master of millions.

Corrigan was a student of human nature. He got his living that way. He looked at Bracklin with a sort of "you-couldn't-do-it-old-chap" smile as he said, "Oh, that's out of the question, Jim."

"Look here, Chet, you little runt, do you think I hiked down here from the Klondike with only eleven dollars in my jeans?"

"Oh, I know you're pretty well fixed, Jim, but this costs money, real money."

"Just what might you call real money?"

"Well," said Corrigan, sitting down, taking an envelope from his pocket and beginning to figure on it, "men like Radbourne and Kelly, and Galvin, would have to get twenty thousand a year. Of course we'd take in enough before the season is half over to pay the whole year's expenses, but we've got to give 'em all a guarantee and some advance. Let me see—" Corrigan proceeded to make figures on the back of the envelope. Finally he looked up.

"It's no use, Jim, it's all out of the question. Counting first expenses, advance money to players, leasing ball parks, etc., it would take a couple of hundred thousand to put it across." Corrigan leaned back in his chair and sighed dismally.

"It's a grub stake. Are you sure you could get them old ball players?"

"You don't mean to say you've got it in small change, Jim?"

"Say, out our way, two hundred

thou' don't talk big. I thought this town had real money. How long would it take you to organize that there league?"

"Two weeks," snapped Corrigan. (The fish was pulling hard.)

"Get right after it, Chet, get right after it. I've got ten times that money on deposit and an even hundred thousand in paper money downstairs for spendin' money."

Corrigan wet his lips with the tip of his tongue and managed to say, "Jim, it'll take all of my time, but I'll do it for you, believe me I will, because I'm anxious to see the boys back, and I want you to see a real game."

A crack on the back nearly upset him.

"Go to it, old mug. Why, it's been more than fifteen years since I saw one of 'em on the diamond. Won't you take me out and give me a knock-down to 'em?"

"Surest thing you know, Jim. I'll go out now to see if I can round some of them up and we'll have a little dinner tonight, and talk it over."

Corrigan showed no trace of nervousness as Bracklin accompanied him down the elevator, but in the foyer he said, "I'll come and get you tonight about seven, Jim. We'll have the dinner early because even if these old-timers are not allowed to play in the leagues, they always keep fit, and you can't get them to stay up all night. Believe me, they'll be a happy bunch when I tell them there's a chance for them to get into a brand-new league and one that's run by a good old sport."

Corrigan hastened out. There was



much to be accomplished before seven. Bracklin sauntered over to the telephone desk.

"Say Sis, you know all the good shows in town. Tell me what's a real lively one where I can kill time this afternoon."

The big-eyed blonde telephone operator looked at Bracklin in amazement.

"Good *night*, Mr. Bracklin! You wouldn't go into a hot stuffy theatre this beautiful day, would you?"

"When I go to a ball game I want to see real baseball, where they give you something to look at and don't stack the cards. I don't cotton to none of these crooked games where they don't make a home run in a week."

"Why, Mr. Bracklin, who's been kidding you? Baseball's on the level."

"That's all right, Sis; now tell me about a show."

"My name isn't Sis!" The big-eyed blonde looked Bracklin square in the eye.

"Well, give me your handle, Goldie, and I'll use it."

"I might say it was 'Ruby Pearl' or 'Hortense Harcourt,' Mr. Bracklin, but believe me, I'm not a bit ashamed of my name even if it ain't got no tassels on it. I am plain Sarah Hicks," and Miss Hicks defiantly patted a golden curl down over her left eye and smiled complacently at Lucky Bracklin.

"Wrong, Sis,—I mean Sadie, you're far from plain. You're the farthest from plain of any lady I've ever seen in my travels and I've come some distance. Well, what's your advice about a show?"

"If I was you, Mr. Bracklin, I'd go

to see 'Her Husband's Wife' up at the Baronet, that is, if you really want to see a genuine show."

"Thanks, Sadie——"

"Miss Hicks."

"Just as you say. Call you Miss Hicks if you want me to, Sadie," and as Bracklin laid down his customary gold eagle, he actually blushed at his own bravery.

At half past seven that night, Corrigan ushered Bracklin into a private dining room at the Elbamoon. They were not in evening clothes. "You know, Jim," explained Corrigan, "these old-timers are plain boys and don't care much for floss, so of course we won't embarrass them by dollying up in our 'soup and fish.'"

"Just so, Chet; I know them fellers. I seen them play twenty years ago and they warn't a dude among 'em."

Five men were sitting back from a large round table. Corrigan proceeded to do the honors. First he put his hand on Sandy Peterson's shoulder. Sandy ducked involuntarily. Heretofore, when an arm had reached out for him like that, it had been encased in police-department blue.

"Boys," said Corrigan, "this is Mr. James J. Bracklin, an old-time sport who has been up at the Klondike ten years or so, and he never knew what a dirty trick the baseball trust had put over on you. He's a sport all the way through and he knows baseball from the ground up, although he hasn't seen the game for fifteen years at least. Why, he was telling me today he remembers seeing most of you fellers on the diamond. Of course you boys have changed some



in fifteen years, and the chances are, Mr. Bracklin may not recognise all of you. Besides, a player looks entirely different when he gets his street clothes on. This," and Corrigan again put his hand on Sandy Peterson's shoulder, "this is old Charlie Radbourne!"

"Mighty glad to meet you!" exclaimed Bracklin, and he said it as though he meant it. Peterson winced under Bracklin's hearty handshake.

Then the other introductions were made. Tony Corrigo, otherwise known as "Tony the Tapper," owing to certain fake pool-room episodes, was duly presented as Jim Galvin. Little Joe Wise, whose portrait in the Rogue's Gallery bore the inscription "Alias Badger Joe," this time alias "Charlie Bennett," shook hands with Bracklin, who was duly impressed. It was Pat Dowd's turn next. Pat was red of face and black of record. His profession was that of operating various clubs until the police came in and carted away the wheels, cards, and other fixtures.

"This," said Corrigan with great pride, "is old 'King Kelly.'"

"Old 'slide-Kelly-slide'?" asked Bracklin.

"You're on, bo. I'd like an iron man for every rod I slid between bases. I——"

Corrigan hastily nudged Pat. It wasn't safe for him to talk too long, and he had already made one break, saying "bases" instead of "bags," although Bracklin would not have noticed that in a thousand years.

Then they started to gather about the big table, when one of the men brushed past Corrigan and gave him

a nudge. Amidst the scraping of chairs, Corrigan leaned over to his man, Mike Feeney by name, and whispered, "who th' hell did I say you was, Mike?" and Mike whispered back, "some guy named Casey."

"Oh, yes," exclaimed Corrigan jovially, "I almost forgot Casey, here. Jim, this is the celebrated Casey."

Bracklin shook hands but looked a bit puzzled.

"You ain't forgot Casey, have you, Jim?" asked Corrigan.

"Why-er-no, I——"

"Sure, Jim, you remember Casey. He's the chap that got so famous they wrote poetry about him. Don't you remember?"

'Ten thousand eyes looked on as he  
rubbed his hands in dirt;  
Ten thousand hands applauded as he  
wiped 'em on his shirt.'

"You must remember that, Jim; it was called 'Casey at the Bat'; and it ended up with something about 'somewhere the sun is shining,' because mighty Casey had struck out."

"Sure, sure!" exclaimed Bracklin. "I heard a actor named Hopperwolf, or something like that, recite that poem but I never expected to meet Casey himself," and Bracklin again shook hands warmly with Mr. Michael Feeney.

During the dinner, Corrigan's eye travelled rapidly from man to man, in his choice little party of celebrated "old-time ball players." He did most of the talking himself. The details of forming a fourth league were gone over with much enthusiasm. At first Bracklin favored calling it the "Ham-bone League," and he explained that he struck his multi-million dollar mine because he happened to see a dog dig-



ging up an old buried ham bone, and this dog was pawing out solid gold nuggets at the rate of forty or more a minute. Corrigan diplomatically suggested calling it the "Continental League." He told Bracklin that few people would understand the association surrounding the title "Hambone," and would be inclined to make fun of it.

At the close of the dinner, it was decided to get busy organizing the Continental Baseball League bright and early the next morning.

"Well, Jim, we've got it started," announced Corrigan next day. "I've got a line on some of the best ball parks in the country. I've got to put down some cash for an option, do a lot of telegraphing, and advance some money on contracts with the players. I should think about ten thousand would give us a good start on it."

"Just so, Chet; I'll go down to the office and get it, but hold on——"

Corrigan did hold on—to his breath.

"I've known you for years, Chet, and I'm satisfied, but I'm too much of a Yank to buy a pig in a poke. I come over here to see some baseball and I want to see it. Now you get up a little game between these old boys and just let in three or four hundred of the real sports, and I'll be as contented as a squaw with a brass bracelet."

"What's that?" asked Corrigan, alarmed.

"Why, it's just like this, Chet; I'm crazy to see them good old boys play a real game of ball. You get up that game so I can see it. That'll make me happy and at the same time it'll be deliverin' the goods. You'll get the

ten thousand cash in hand on the spot and as much more as you want."

Twice Corrigan swallowed hard before he could speak. As he did this, he was trying to conjure up mental pictures of "Tony the Tapper," "Pat Dowd," "Sandy Peterson," and others of that crowd, trying to put up a real game of ball. He could see that it was no time to parley with Lucky Jim.

"That's business, Jim. I don't blame you a bit. Now, if I can get the boys to come out and give us an exhibition, I'll do it."

"I thought you said they always kept in trim."

"Sure they do," hastily assented Corrigan. "I'll fix up that game for you right away." Then Corrigan left the Greater Grand and went out to arrange the exhibition game. In his day Corrigan had "arranged" many things; but to get a bunch of dissipated, muscle-bound and flabby crooks to put up a swift game of baseball, appeared to Corrigan as just about the limit. But this was no time to stop at anything, with ten thousand easy money and more in sight.

About noon, four days later, Bracklin stepped out of a telephone booth at the Greater Grand wearing a broad grin. He had just called up Corrigan and learned that everything was arranged for a game that afternoon at two. As he approached the desk, he fished out a handful of silver from his pocket, carefully picked out a dime, thrust his fingers in his vest pocket where he kept his golden eagles, and produced one of them. Placing the dime on top of the eagle, he laid them gently on Miss Hicks's



desk. All the time, that estimable young lady, big-eyed and blonde, was regarding him with a most peculiar expression. She had heard his conversation with Corrigan. It was not the first she had heard.

"Sis, or Miss Hicks, accordin' to how mild an' amiable you're a-feeling to me today, seein' as how you say you like level baseball, I wish you'd come along with me this afternoon and see a real, bang-up, genuine game, without no crooked business and without no trusts."

"Do you really mean—that is, do you really believe there's going to be a game, Mr. Bracklin?"

"Sure, I mean it. A real game; ol' 'King Kelly,' and Radbourne, and all them old-timers are goin' to play for my special benefit. It's a secret, Sis, and I'm goin' to ask you to say nothin' 'bout it till I get ready to spring it; but what do you say? Will you jump into the benzine buggy with me and run up and see it?"

"You don't mean, oh, well, never mind; honest, I'm sorry, Mr. Bracklin, but I couldn't get away."

"You ain't half as sorry as I am, Sis," said Bracklin, looking at her admiringly.

Five minutes later, a young man called for Bracklin. He explained that Corrigan had sent him to show him the way to the ball park, as Corrigan himself was too busy up at the park.

While Bracklin and his escort were heading north along Broadway in the touring car Bracklin had engaged for an indefinite period, Chet Corrigan was literally running around in circles in a small private ball park up in

Westchester. Already his choice aggregation of "fans" were beginning to arrive. They had been engaged by some of Chet's lieutenants at a promise of two dollars per head. He had hired over two hundred of them—probably the choicest array of loafers and petty crooks ever assembled in any three-acre lot.

In the dressing room, Corrigan was talking with twenty men—the celebrated "old-time baseball stars."

"Look here, Chet," warned Sandy Peterson, "if you ring in a real ball on us, it'll bust my hands wide open and then I'll queer the whole plant."

"That's all right, Sandy, see—" and Chet produced several balls from his pocket—"here's the ringers, Sandy, feel 'em. Soft rubber, covered with leather to make them sound like the real thing. Now don't you forget," and Corrigan wheeled and pointed direct at Patsy Dowd, "you are Kelly, old 'King Kelly,' and you've got to slide. You've got to slide every time you get a chance, or else Bracklin won't think he's getting his money's worth."

"How about the coin right now?" asked Badger Joe, who was to star on the cast as "Charlie Bennett."

"Now don't get nervous, you guys; I'm riggin' this and it's going just like clockwork. When Bracklin comes, he'll bring the money—real money. You get your little hundred down, cash, and when we pull the big pot out of him—the hundred thousand—you get another four hundred apiece."

"But suppose he gets wise?" questioned Mr. Michael Feeney, soon to enact the role of the far-famed "Casey as the Bat."



"Wise, nothing. I'm planting this; I know Bracklin from A to Z, and I tell you that if you play this game right today, it'll be like grabbing a rake-off from a speak-easy—a regular pipe."

By the time Bracklin arrived, the two hundred imitation fans were nearly all in their places in the little grand-stand. Corrigan, approaching to greet him, dropped his white handkerchief. Three hundred and sixty eyes were gazing at Corrigan—twenty of the hired spectators had lost an eye in various questionable encounters—and when they saw Corrigan's handkerchief drop, they arose as one man and gave Bracklin three hearty cheers.

"They recognize a sport all right, Jim," whispered Corrigan, as he led Bracklin into the private box at the grand-stand. Bracklin was duly impressed and as happy as a boy.

The "old-timers" marched out to the benches. They, too, were greeted with a hearty cheer. Dowd, Feeney, Peterson, and some of the others, Bracklin had met at Corrigan's famous league-forming dinner, saluted Bracklin who in turn, shouted, "Hello, Radbourne! Hi there, Kelly," and "Good boy, Casey." Some of the "fans" laughed a little at this, but Corrigan swept a stern glance amongst them and they subsided.

The game started. Time and time again, the soft ball was swatted away out in the left and the batter scored a home-run, whereupon Bracklin waved his hat, yelled enthusiastically and declared, "*that's* like old times. That's what I come all the way from Klondike to see!"

Patsy Dowd slid bases until his bor-

rowed uniform was in shreds and the cuticle of his wrists and chin in scarcely better condition. They were long innings and at four o'clock they were just beginning the eighth. The hired fans were getting uneasy. The fake team of barroom loafers were nearly fagged out. The score stood "Klondikes 21—New Yorks 19." As a tribute to Bracklin, one of the teams had been named the "Klondikes." The idea of keeping the Klondikes a few runs ahead, was a bit of Corrigan's diplomacy.

Between the seventh and eighth innings, things were getting hot for Corrigan. A few obstreperous fans wanted to see the color of Corrigan's money, and besides, they were getting thirsty.

"These good old boys are the most trusting chaps you ever knew," Corrigan told Bracklin, hiding his desperation. "Why, do you know, Jim, a bunch of them good old fellows came up here without even their carfare back. That shows what they think of the game. Doesn't it do you good to see real baseball with all the thrills?"

"It sure does, Chet; it's great baseball." When we get our Continental League goin', we'll show 'em what baseball is from New York to Seattle, acrost and back, and up and down." As Bracklin spoke, his hand went to his inside coat pocket. An expression of blank concern crossed his face.

"Thunderation, Chet! what a lum-mox I am! Here I've gone and forgot to bring up that money!"

Corrigan went white.

"Good God, Jim!"

The gambler was thinking of his own skin now, but he added craftily,



"I wouldn't disappoint the boys for a million dollars."

"Get that motor, Chet; there's two more innings to play and I'll scoot down to th' Greater Grand and get th' cash. Hold them off on the last inning. I must see it."

Corrigan appeared, following Bracklin to the gate, explaining in a whispered aside to one of his men, but they followed him out to the car.

At the hotel Bracklin proceeded to get his money. As he jammed the roll in his pocket, the big-eyed blonde at the telephone booth coughed.

"Howdy, Sis," big Bracklin smiled, "sorry you didn't see the game."

Sarah sniffed.

"Thought you liked baseball."

"I do, Mr. Bracklin, but——"

"But what?"

"Please step in the telephone booth there, Mr. Bracklin—someone wants to talk with you."

"Can't now—in a hurry."

"*Please*, and quick, Mr. Bracklin."

Lucky Bracklin obeyed. There was a look in Miss Hicks's eye that commanded. He lifted the receiver to his ear, as the voice came through. As he listened, his eyes opened wide and he tried to interrupt, but the voice insisted. What came over the wire to Lucky Bracklin sobered him and made him grip the wad of bills that bulged his inside pocket. But after all, it was not the money that disturbed him most. The voice that came through the wire sent an electric shock to regions untouched.

"Sis," he broke in finally, "are you married?"

"I'm talking about certain crooks who are trying to get your wad, and not about matrimony," came the voice, with some asperity.

"I'm talking about matrimony, and I don't care a royal hoot in Honolulu about Corrigan and his gang. Will you answer my question, Sis? Will you jump into my car, go down and get a license with me and start back to Saskulask in the Dap-huh-nee before——"

The telephone clicked, and when big Jim came out of the booth, Miss Sarah Hicks was gone. The hem of her skirt was just visible as the outer door at the Greater Grand closed. Bracklin saw and made one leap.

As the Daphne sped over the switches at the tail-end of a west-bound train, Lucky Bracklin handed her that was Miss Sarah Hicks, a folded slip of paper.

"Keep it for me, Sis. If I ever get soft again, I can read it over and it will cheer me up. It's a note I sent Corrigan."

Sarah read the note and Lucky Jim's laugh could be heard above the noise of the Daphne's wheels.

"Dear Chet," it read, "I'm so disappointed in that new league of ours that I'm going to give it up for two reasons: First, the boys only made a combined score of forty, and when I used to play ball we made from sixty to eighty scores a side. My second and best reason is that I formed a league myself. It may not startle the world, but it suits me, and if anybody asks you about it, tell 'em it's 'Bracklin and Bracklin, nee Hicks, of the Domestic League.' Next time you're looking for easy money, try a New Yorker."

Yours truly,

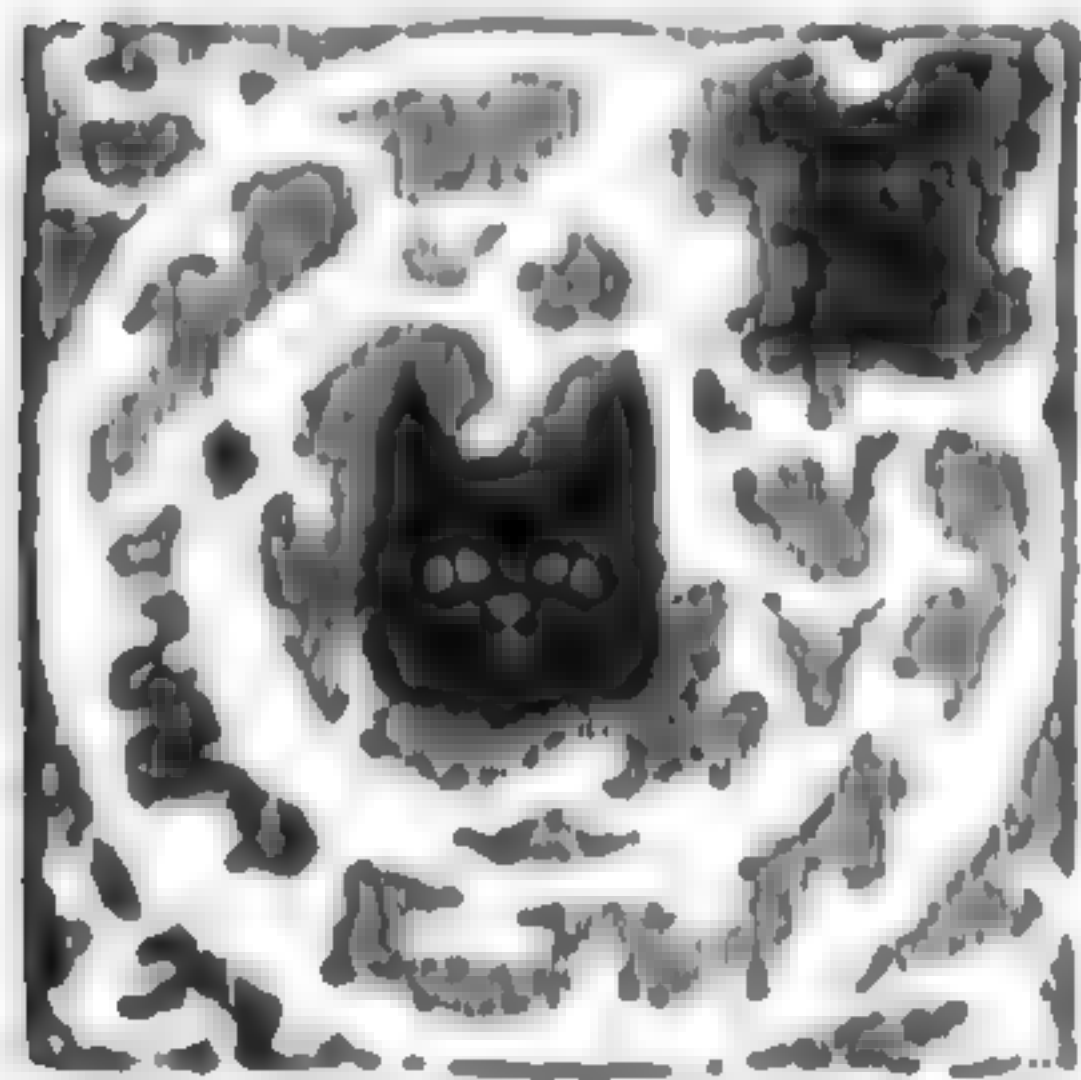
J. J. Bracklin."



# Double Six

BY L. F. BOFFEY AND TED O'NEIL

*Have you ever thought of the unrecorded tragedies that happen behind the grim walls of a prison? Here is a gripping tale of prison life that will make you "sit-up."*



IGHT years' confinement within walls of stone had driven the color from Jimson's face and yellowed his skin until it resem-

bled oiled fabric rather than living tissue. And, with fabric-like resistance, the skin held all emotion in check, so that pain and fear, and hope and happiness, were never apparent in Jimson's ferrety countenance. His eyes, too, were normally dull and lifeless, as if separated by inner screens from his vividly imaginative brain—but now the screens had lifted slightly, and pale blue gleams of delight shone through the splits parting his eyelids. For, with freedom only a week distant, Jimson was happier than ever before in his thirty years of existence.

He trudged to a workbench at the end of the shop aisle, dumped a bundle of broom corn from his shoulder to the floor, and shifted position slightly, so that he could watch the keeper from the corners of his eyes. His pantomimic skill in general, but particularly his manner of jerking his forefinger at the bundle on the floor, would have beguiled any neutral observer into believing that the broom corn was the subject of his discourse. But Jimson was dissembling, for the

convict at the bench was his special crony.

"How goes it today, pal?" he gurgled tonelessly.

"Always the same, today or tomorrow," came the listless reply. "I can't stand this grind much longer, Jimmy—not for five years, at any rate. This morning I was tempted again to do the high dive over the gallery, and I'll have to give way to it before long."

From sheer force of habit, Jimson stifled the sigh upon his lips, but he thrilled with sympathy for his unfortunate comrade. The black demon of despair, which periodically grips at the hearts of all immured in steel and stone, was no stranger to Jimson—and there were comparatively few shattered ideals in Jimson's own retrospection. He strove to cloak his concern with gruff words of warning:

"Cut out them thoughts, pal. First thing you know you'll be thinking seriously of the Dutch act, an' once over the gallery, there's no coming back alive."

"Better so, Jimmy. There's a long list gone before, and the list will continue to grow after my name—or my number, rather—is added. What have I to live for?—to be overworked, underfed and kennelled for another five years of horrible monotony? No, by God!"



Into Jimson's furtive eyes came dread—intense dread for the welfare of the man beside him. His finger vibrated sharply as if to emphasize a final instruction concerning the broom corn, then he bent and snapped apart the strings confining the bundle. From his almost motionless lips came a hissing caution, couched in prison vernacular:

"Careful, pal! The screw is neck-in' this way!"

He wadded the string into a ball, stowed it in his jumper pocket and slouched away from the bench, apparently unconscious of surveillance. But he halted abreast of the raised platform at the end of the shop, not daring to ignore the keeper's crooked forefinger.

"You're leaving pretty soon; eh, Jimson?" queried the keeper, his tone faintly ironic.

"Yes, sir—in a week." Jimson's face was blindly apathetic, but there was a covert sneer in his voice. And the keeper, sensing it, flushed angrily red; whereat Jimson rejoiced. It pleased him to give offense now that he was practically immune from punishment.

"All right—but keep your mouth shut in the shop while you're here," the keeper snapped, then turned to the runner beside his platform. "Fetch Carlin over here," he ordered.

Jimson knew what was coming and for a moment he faced a red mist, while his heart clanged, steam-hammer fashion, against his ribs. Then he stepped forward cringingly, pleadingly, his face strained with fear and horror.

"Carlin wasn't talkin', sir; he only

listened to what I had to say about the corn," he babbled. "You ain't goin' to punish him, Mr. Blair? I'm floor man, an' I had to tell him to be careful 'cause the corn's comin' mighty rotten—"

"You get about your work—quick!" It was a positive command and Jimson, not daring to disobey, slunk away; but photographed in his mind was a vision of Carlin's white, fear-stricken face; and, without looking back, he knew that the keeper was glowering evilly upon the culprit, now sullenly motionless before him.

"I spotted you, all right, Carlin," rasped the keeper, "and you can hand this report to the deputy." He scribbled upon a blank as he spoke. "I'm going to teach you and the rest of these blanked 'cons' that rules must be obeyed in this shop."

He might well have stopped there—but he didn't. Instead, he leaned forward, his face malignant with passion, his mouth twisted into a snarl that was bitter, pitiless, baleful, and with rare fluency and precision he cursed the luckless convict. Carlin, his chest heaving and his long, slender fingers clinching and relaxing in harmony with his murderous thoughts, stood, listened—and was silent. But when the flood of invective ceased and a snap of the keeper's fingers signified dismissal, Carlin gazed for a lingering moment into his reviler's eyes, his own eyes gleaming with enmity and lust for revenge. Then he turned and strode doggedly behind the runner to his punishment.

Jimson, cowering in the corner which was his post of duty, passed from sorrowful retrospection to vis-



ioning impossible retaliation. He pictured his puny fists battering the keeper's face until the swarthy flesh was pulplike and sodden with blood; he thrilled with savage delight at the conception of the keeper croaking for mercy—and he groaned because his imagination would carry him no further.

A racking, gurgly cough from the adjoining bench where his helper sat, hampered Jimson's train of thought and irritated him. He faced around angrily.

"For God's sake, choke that noise, Clark!" he muttered, low-toned. "It's drivin' me loony!"

But stopping the cough was for the moment impossible and Jimson, watching the heaving shoulders and distorted face of the man beside him, felt his vexation slowly dissolve into pity. When the paroxysm was over, the man withdrew a crumpled rag from his mouth, and Jimson saw that it was splotted with crimson. He shifted to the end of the bench so that he could reach over and pat the other's shoulder.

"Don't mind me, old man," he contritely begged. "They've just taken my pal to the hole an' thinkin' about it upset me, 'cause it's mostly my fault. Cough's some better, ain't it?"

"Better!" Clark was about Jimson's age, but his face was old—old with the marks of approaching dissolution, and bitterness intensified the semblance of age. "Mebbe the doctor thought so when he dosed me up this morning. Three months, he said—if I'm lucky."

He coughed again and Jimson turned his head until the rattling sound

ceased. It was bad to hear, that cough—but it was worse to watch the accompanying physical contortions.

"Three months," Clark droned on,—"and I was a well man when I come here. They made a lunger of me and they'll keep me here until the job is finished. Three months ain't a hell of a long time, at that."

"Whyn't you try for a pardon?" suggested Jimson, trying to make his voice sound hopeful. "In your condition—"

"No use, Jimmy; no use at all. I ain't got money or friends or nothin'—but I have got a shaver of a kid in an asylum down south, who I'd like to see before I pass out. I reckon I'd give one of them three months—" his voice was terribly wistful—"to see the kid again, Jimmy. But there ain't no chance."

Once more he stopped to cough.

"I had my chance last year in the grindin' shop," he ruminated. "You remember Hogan, Jimmy?—I was standin' next to him when he broke loose an' went for the guard. I could have tackled him easy, and won a pardon; but I was scared stiff and all I drew was a stretch in the hole. It was my chance, all right, and I passed it up. I wish I had it again."

Then the idea was born in Jimson's brain—a wild, daring idea that struggled for construction and refused to be discarded as wholly absurd. Jimson, fashioning the details against his better judgment, saw the weak points and strengthened them; rehearsed the action over and over in his intellect until he was persuaded that it could be carried out. Clark's cough ceased to produce irritation and Clark's voice



dwindled to a mere hum in Jimson's consciousness. It was at least ten minutes later that he spoke:

"That chance, now: if it was a gamble between you an' another chap for life or death—would you take a shot at it?"

"I'm goin' to die in three months anyway, ain't I?" rejoined Clark testily. "Of course I'd take a chance. But what's the use of supposin'?"

"Lot's o' use," said Jimson, and then: "The screw's watchin' us an' I gotter be careful. But I'll spring the scheme on you as soon's I git the chance. Only, if you blab——!"

Jimson's voice could bite like a tempered drill upon occasion.

Back from the punishment cell staggered Carlin,—a physically changed and spirit-broken man. His face, horribly white, was creased with agony lines; his wrists were raw and blood-clotted where manacles had been forced into the flesh by the weight of his suspended body; his blinking lids and watery, almost transparent eyes, were underlined by crescents of deep purple. Keeper Blair grinned at the apparition—grinned with positive malevolence.

"Come to work again, eh?" he leered. "Well, skip along to your bench and see if you've learned enough to keep to the rules for a day or two."

"It was the system speaking through the keeper—the system that, having caught a convict transgressing and doled out the customary measure of punishment, was now satisfied because the convict was again at work making corn into brooms. Blair,

with smug complacency, turned to his desk and opened the ledger wherein he entered daily reports for the cognizance of higher officials. Small chance, in his opinion, of any rules being broke that morning,—for Carlin's presence was an object lesson.

Had he felt otherwise, he might have noticed Jimson stealing circumspectly down the aisle towards Carlin's bench—Jimson, with a bundle of broom corn in his arms and a glib lie on the end of his tongue, for use if his manœuver were noticed, and he were halted for explanation. But the angel—or devil—of prisons guarded Jimson; and when the keeper finally glanced up from an obstinate phrase of entry, Jimson was ensconced behind the concealing frame of Carlin's bench.

Carlin's jumper hung from a corner of the bench; and into one of the pockets Jimson transferred a greasy package he had carried inside his shirt next to his skin.

"I swiped a lump from breakfast, pal—keep on workin', for cripe's sake—an' I guess it'll feel good to yer belly," he whispered hoarsely. "Slammed it into you hard, huh?"

"Mighty hard!" gritted Carlin, the words jerking through his still lips in the pauses of his hammer's rat-tat. "But it's the last chance they'll get at me. I'm going over the gallery to-night."

"No, y'ain't!" There was eagerness in Jimson's localized whisper, and a trace of anxiety, besides.

"Ye're goin' to tackle a scheme what's got a pardon danglin' at the end of it—if ye're game enough to



chance croakin' by a different route than the gallery."

"If you'll say that over in English, I might catch the drift of it," Carlin slurred incredulously.

Jimson said it over in plain, unmistakable language. It took fully five minutes for the recital—five long, tingling minutes, during which Carlin played feverishly with his tools and material. Twice he seemed to feel the keeper's eyes boring into the small of his back; but each time a furtive sidelong glance reassured him. But there was the awful possibility that a machine might go wrong, or a convict's supply of corn might peter out; and then Jimson would be needed—and exposed. So Carlin was relieved when the sibilant monologue came to an end and Jimson, first peering out to see if the keeper was busy, rose stealthily to his feet and quickly grabbed up the bundle of corn he had laid beside the bench. For one brief moment the eyes of the two men met; Jimson's flashing an inquiry more positive than articulation; Carlin's bewildered, hopeful, yet despairingly hopeless.

Then Carlin nodded, almost imperceptibly, though inwardly railing at himself for a driveling idiot. The scheme was so wild, so fantastic, that it seemed sheer craziness to consider its success a possibility. Only an unwritten penitentiary law favored it, and another unwritten law forecasted death for one, at least, of the participants. Yet, in Carlin's state of mind, death in any form was infinitely preferable to further incarcerations in the underground punishment cell.

His eyes, darting sideways, follow-

ed Jimson to the keeper's stand; saw the keeper look up from his book, nod briefly, and return to his work; saw Jimson—awesome of face—shuffling down the aisle towards him. And Jimson's voice, though of normal pitch, sounded harsh, strained, to Carlin's ears.

"The shop needs handles, Carlin, an' Mr. Blair says you should help me load 'em." To the few convicts within hearing scope, the words implied that the keeper, and not Jimson, had made the selection of his helper.

Carlin wheeled around and raised his hand—prison code for permission to leave his bench. Blair glanced towards him, jerked his head upward in mechanical assent—and Carlin trudged shakily down the aisle in Jimson's wake. At the end of the shop they stopped to haul out an iron truck; then, each grasping an end of the handle crossbar, they proceeded to the storeroom. Midway, Clark joined them and almost immediately dropped back to the rear of the truck, neither looking at them nor speaking, but coughing—coughing hackingly and incessantly.

Into the storeroom they clattered—the trio and the truck; and Jimson swung behind to close the door. The breath came from his lips—blue, quivering lips—in jerky gasps, and his eyeballs protruded froglike from lidless sockets. He fumbled in his pocket, and brought out two wooden dice, and extended them to Clark.

"Tain't no use talkin'—you both know what to do," he said, and words crackled from his dry throat. "You first, Clark—hurry an' get it over with!"



Clark's talon-shaped fingers clutched the cubes, folded them, his lower knuckles standing out prominently, vividly white, from the intensity of his grip. He asked a brief question and his voice seemed to come from a great depth in his body.

"One flop?"

"One flop—high wins," croaked Jimson.

Then Clark, with a sudden motion of his wrists, ejected the dice from his palm. One dice stopped leadenly as it touched the floor, almost as if a magnetic impulse had stilled its progress; the other dice rotated sharply, its tiny clatter against the wooden boards sounding ominously distinct to the ears of the watchers. There were six black spots on the upper surface of the motionless die; and when the other settled down within an inch of its twin, there were four black spots showing.

"Ten!" exulted Clark, a world of relief in his cackling, hysterical voice. "I guess I win—I win!"

Jimson retrieved the cubes. While the dice were spinning, the yellowness of his face had merged into ashy gray, but now the bilious hue was returning. Suddenly he jumped to the door, leaned over, applied his ear to the rough boards. Carlin, apparently more composed than the others, turned to a stack of broom handles formed tier upon tier, dragged down a dozen or more and tossed them upon the truck, all the while growling an insistent summons through locked teeth for Clark to join him.

"It's all right," gurgled Jimson, upright again. "Thought I heard the screw comin'." His eyes roved pity-

ingly over Carlin's face, the clenched fingers of his extended hand concealing the dice in his palm. "Your turn, pal—an' God be with you!"

There was no hesitation in Carlin's attitude—and no hope. He took the dice, shook them for a second or two in his closed palm, then opened his fingers and rolled the wooden blocks upon the floor. His eyes were dull, lifeless, resigned; and though he crouched tensely over the spinning cubes, he had no expectation of beating Clark's throw. All the elements of chance were against him—and chance had never favored Carlin from the day that he signed another man's name to a check.

The dice stopped rolling. Carlin's eyes blazed wonderingly, dulled again in disbelief of what they saw, then reflected, in one consistent gleam, joy, exultation, glory. Clark staggered back against the broom-handle pile, and a low, horrible whine cadenced through his colorless lips. Jimson leaned over and snatched up the dice, glancing at Clark furtively, apprehensively; but Clark was deep in the dregs of despair—despair intensified by the choked cry from Carlin:

"Double six, by God!"

Echo-like, came Clark's wail:

"Double six! And I lose—I lose!"

He rubbed his eyes with his knuckles; rubbed as if he wanted to erase the vision of the death-dealing cubes from his mind and, perhaps, to hide from the other men the deadly fear that lurked under his eyelids. Jimson and Carlin watched him dubiously, but he gave them no chance to express the doubt that assailed them, for he straightened suddenly and his



demeanor was at once friendly, gentle, martyrlike.

"Unlock the door, Jimmy, and let's load these handles before the screw gets suspicious." He turned to the wooden pile, but added over his shoulder as an afterthought, "It's all right, boys, I'll go through my end of the bargain. I'm nearly dead now."

For the third time during the afternoon, the keeper found occasion to chide Clark because of some minor infraction, and his final warning was harsh and snappy. Clark swung around to face the reprimand, his eyes sneery, contemptuous; his colorless lips shrivelled up from yellow, fanged teeth, through the interstices of which dribbled crimson-tinged saliva. In his attitude was the hatred and disdain he dared not express in words.

"One more break and you go to the deputy," was the keeper's ultimatum. "Those bum lungs of yours don't allow you to smash all the rules to pieces. Get back to your bench."

Clark shambled to his station, squatted down on the bench, and fully conscious that the keeper was watching him, fished a chunk of bread from his pocket and started to munch it. He was playing a game—a game that promised him nothing better than hastened dissolution; and he was playing it with elaborate cleverness and nerve. He giggled foolishly in the face of the runner sent to fetch him to the stand; then he threw the crust away and passively marched at the runner's heels.

"You're bound to go to the deputy, then," rasped the keeper, as Clark stood at the platform with out-thrust tongue licking crumbs from the cor-

ners of his mouth. "I guess you know what eating in the shop will get you—and I'll bet a hat you swiped that bread from the dining room. Why didn't you keep it and carry it along with you to the hole?"

"You ain't going to send me to the hole?" quavered Clark incredulously. "I couldn't stand more'n two or three hours down there and you know it."

"No—I guess you couldn't." Suave brutality hung in the keeper's voice; he spoke without looking up from the report he was writing. "But you'll have a chance to try it, all right."

Then, having completed the report, he looked up—looked up just in time to swerve aside from the savage onslaught which landed Clark beside him on the platform. There was madness in the convict's eyes; something of the wild fury and power which characterizes beasts at bay, in his frenzied, vicious attack; marvelous energy, seemingly gathered from the air, in the corporeality that a moment before was starved and racked with disease. Clark whirled a broommaker's hammer above his head and screeched crazily as he advanced; the keeper answered with a frantic wail for help just before the hammer crashed against his temple and stretched him, bleeding and stomach-sick, upon the floor of his stand.

Clark threw the hammer aside and from his waistband drew a thin-bladed, murderous instrument that once had been a file, but now was ground and sharpened to stiletto edge. He flung himself upon the prone body of the keeper, deadly menace in his flaming, downthrust face, and poised the weapon to strike.



"Send me to the deputy, will you—you skunk?" he shrilled. "Send me to the hole to die! I'll go, blast you!—I'll have to go—but you'll reach hell before I do!"

Sheer horror held the keeper's eyes open; the flesh below his ribs quivered in anticipation of the downward flash that would gouge the life from his trembling body. He groaned, tried to roll over on his stomach, but the straddled weight of the convict forced him back. A prayer gurgled upon his lips—a futile, amateurish prayer, for only a miracle could thwart the death hovering above him.

And then the miracle—

A drab body vaulted to the stand, smashed into Clark, and flung him forcibly from his prostrate victim. It was Carlin—Carlin alone, of the fifty onlookers in convict garb, who had dared rush to the rescue. Clinging, biting, striking; hands alternately tugging at each other's hair and clawing at each other's features, Clark and Carlin tumbled and rolled and fought upon the platform floor. The dazed keeper struggled to his knees, clung to the edge of his desk, and with blood streaming thickly red from the gash in his temple, watched the combatants through glazed, terrified eyes. He screamed once for aid; and in the peculiar silence of the room, broken only by gasping exhalations from the struggling men, his voice was shrill, womanishly fearful.

Thudding footsteps from far down the corridor answered him, foretokening the coming of the rescue guard. But it seemed that they would come too late, for Clark, with a superhuman effort, wrenched his hand free—the

hand with the knife—and struck viciously upward. The blade, poorly aimed, ripped the flesh of Carlin's arm from elbow to shoulder, and the blood, spurting out, drenched both men with warm, crimson stickiness. The wound sickened Carlin for the moment and he staggered back—and Clark swung with maniacal fury towards the keeper. Then Carlin leaped upon him again, clawing, straining; and they tumbled together to the floor.

Through the door crashed the rescue guard: five sentries and a keen-eyed officer, all with rifles held ready for action. The sentries lined immediately against the wall, prepared summarily to quell any demonstration from the convicts slouching back against benches and machines; and the officer, taking in the situation with one sweeping, comprehensive glance, rushed to the keeper's stand.

His clubbed rifle swung with vicious force against the two men on the platform floor, and Carlin, uppermost, groped wildly for equilibrium, then slithered to the edge of the stand, yelping like a stricken cur. Clark tried to rise, but the rifle muzzle forced him back and he ceased to resist, dropping the knife and crooking his forearms over his face. Postured thus, he wailed—a terrible, intense cry, that was a swan song of despair.

"Shut up!" snarled the officer. "You're not dead—yet!" He hailed his men across the room: "Over here, one of you, to look after this other chap."

The keeper interposed weakly.

"He's all right, Captain—the one you're holding is your meat!" He applied his hand to his forehead and



shuddered at the sight of the thick blood that spattered on his palm. "I'd be a goner, sure, if this other fellow hadn't jumped to help me. You'd better get us both to the doctor."

"Oh, that's it, eh?" The thin lips of the captain twisted into what he intended to be a kindly, tolerant smile, as he regarded Carlin with changed interest. "I'll take care of you both in a jiffy."

He curtly addressed the sentry answering his call:

"Lug this chap to the deputy's office—shackle him and call Ben to give you a hand. Then come back and shove the rest of the 'cons' into their cells."

After which, he turned to Carlin, and the hand he clapped to the convict's shoulder was smooth and soft.

"Come along, old man; I'll help you to the hospital. Nasty dig, that, on your arm—keep you in bed a couple of weeks, I'll warrant." They were outside, now, in the corridor; Carlin stumbling along with the officer's hand guiding him; the keeper following a few steps to the rear. "You've earned your rest; and I shouldn't be surprised if you had a message from the governor about the time you're on your feet again."

He knew—the thin, eagle-faced captain—that Carlin had fairly won his pardon according to the prime unwritten law of all prisons, for to defend a keeper from death is a convict's surest route to executive clemency.

Jimson, locked in his cell because work in the broom shop was suspended for the day, knew, too, that Carlin was as good as free. There was an

agony of doubt in Jimson's mind—doubt caused by the final sight of Clark's strained, death-dreading face, as he marched away to punishment that must surely extinguish the spark of life in his famished body. And Jimson, struggling with a vague instinct that might once have been his conscience, recalled the terror which flashed into Clark's eyes earlier in the day—in the storeroom, when the dice rolled against him. Something tugged at Jimson's heartstrings and made him yearn to cry.

"Poor old boy! You did splendid!" he muttered regretfully. "It looked like a real scrap, with you cuttin' Carlin, an' all. I'd a-been fooled myself, if I wasn't in the know. An' now you're on the way to the morgue; an' you'll never see that kid o' yours like you wanted to." He was silent for a moment, brooding; then he muttered on, passionately, defensively,—“You was near dead, anyhow, an' Carlin's big, an' strong. He's me pal an' he'll folly me out in a couple o' weeks, instead o' cro king hisself—but I'll never tell him how I cooked the play against you. He'd kill me, likely.”

Jimson's hand strayed to his pocket and played unconsciously with the wooden cubes resting there—four wooden cubes. Suddenly he jerked them out and leaned forward to examine them in the murky light. He separated them, holding a set in each of his hands. Those in his right hand were numbered from one to six, in regulation style; but there were only five-spots and six-spots, each number thrice repeated, on the sandpapered surfaces of each die in his left hand.



# The Paternal Instinct

BY MAURICE BOWMAN PHIPPS

*Practical jokers are dangerous in any family, particularly where young babies and new fathers are concerned. Read what happened to this father.*



HE darkness of late afternoon, the swirling snow, and the eccentric gyrations of a wind-battered umbrella, all combined to prevent Mr. Lemuel Tupper from noticing, until his foot was on the doorstep, anything out of the ordinary in the appearance of his front porch.

And it really was not the appearance of the large market basket reposing serenely before his door which startled him; it was the sounds which emanated from it. There was no mistaking that muffled, plaintive wail. Mr. Tupper's own heir and pride had reached the mature age of four months, and he instantly recognized the insistent cry of a hungry baby.

Mr. Tupper's first and natural instinct was to pick up that basket and enter the house, and if, in the first shock of his discovery, he had not dropped his latch key into the drifted snow, undoubtedly he would have obeyed that impulse. Before he found the key, however, a sudden thought arrested him. What would Mabel say?

Of course, it was absurd to think that Mrs. Tupper could hold him responsible for this unwelcome stranger, but Mr. Tupper, in the two years of his married life, had learned one

thing, if nothing else, and that was that it was quite within the uncanny power of his young wife to twist any unpleasant fact, from the non-appearance of the morning milk to the withholding of the ballot from women, into such shape, that it appeared that Lemuel Tupper alone was the person at fault, and that it was Lemuel's duty to right the wrong he had committed.

So Lemuel hesitated, pulled nervously at the thin wisp of side whiskers—"lambrequins," Mrs. Tupper's younger brother termed them,—and gazed frowningly at the unconscious object at his feet. A fluttering envelope tied to the handle caught his attention and he tore it off; then, holding it so that the faint light from the hall window could fall upon it, saw that his name, in an unfamiliar hand, was written upon it. The note within, though brief, was most decidedly to the point.

"Lem dear," it began, and the temperature of "Lem dear," notwithstanding the snow-storm, approached the boiling point. He quivered with indignation.

Mr. Tupper was not a person to be addressed as Lem. His mother had called him Lemuel, only Heaven knows why, and Lemuel he had remained. To his schoolmates he had been Lemuel; he was Lemuel to a



few of his business associates at the bank, his wife addressed him as Lemuel, and only one person in the entire world ever called him anything else; that person was Mrs. Tupper's brother Roger.

Mr. Tupper generally referred to his brother-in-law as "that impudent young cub," Roger having arrived at that state of moral obliquity, social depravity, and general all-around cussedness, known as the sophomore year; but his unpopularity with his sister's husband did not dampen his buoyant spirits. To him Mr. Tupper was Lem, frequently Lemmy, but even Roger halted before "Lem dear" was reached. And this, this person had the temerity—Mr. Tupper's attention returned to the note.

"Lem dear," he read, "don't think too unkindly of me for doing what I am forced to do. You know how difficult it has been for me to take care of baby as he should be taken care of, but hard as it has been I would not now give him up to you only I am leaving town tomorrow, and where I am going, it would be utterly impossible to appear with a child, so I am leaving him with the one person upon whom he has a claim. I am doing this for the best, as you will later realize. I know that you will love him and be kind to him. Perhaps some day you may have a kind thought for me. Good-bye, you will probably never see me again.

W. D."

Mr. Tupper stood motionless. The whirling snow sifted down his neck unheeded. Surprise had given way to indignation; indignation to a cold, numbing terror. A wail louder than before, galvanized him into action. He seized the basket, stumbled blindly down the steps, and fought his way through the storm toward the police station.

The desk sergeant looked up from his evening paper as the door was

flung violently open and a storm-tossed individual with mutton-chop whiskers, a receding chin, and a large market basket entered.

"'D evenin', Mr. Tupper," he said. "What's wrong?"

"This," Mr. Tupper exclaimed, as he held out his basket, "this is wrong. It's—it's the most outrageous thing I ever heard of. It's monstrous that a respectable citizen has no protection against this sort of thing!"

"What sort of thing?" the sergeant inquired, eyeing the basket as though he expected nothing less than the explosion of an infernal machine. "What's in the basket?"

"A baby!" Mr. Tupper cried, striking a theatrical pose. "A live baby! Someone left it on my porch. The idea of trying to foist such a thing on me!"

"Not yours, eh?" the sergeant queried good-naturedly.

"Not mine! Not——" words failed Mr. Tupper.

"Sergeant," he said at last, "I consider this to be the most monumental piece of impudence I ever heard of. The woman who left this brat on my doorstep is simply trying to ruin my reputation in this community, insinuating that I am the father of this child!"

"How so?" the policeman inquired. "Lots of kids are abandoned on doorsteps, but that don't make the owner of the doorsteps the father, does it? Warn't there no letter with the young one?"

"Letter," Mr. Tupper faltered, "letter? Eh—no. There was no letter—nothing."

What was the use of telling this



amused police sergeant about the letter. It would, Mr. Tupper decided, only complicate matters. Besides, there are some things about which one may have the firmest convictions, but which might be extremely difficult to prove in court. Mr. Tupper's knowledge of the law regarding foundlings was very hazy.

"What am I to do with this baby?"

"Leave it here," the sergeant replied.

"The matron will look after him—or her, til' the Society is notified. That is, of course, unless you want to adopt her—or him, yourself."

Mr. Tupper carefully deposited his burden on the bench, bowed a dignified good-evening, and, with the firm conviction in his heart that the police of his small city were of an altogether too frivolous a cast of mind, turned his steps toward home.

While Mr. Tupper had been enjoying himself at the police station, the customary tranquillity of the Tupper household had been rudely jolted into a state of the wildest frenzy.

Shortly after her husband's retreat with the market basket, Mrs. Tupper appeared upon the scene. She had been to a meeting of the Mothers' Club, her first visit since she had become eligible for membership, and, consequently, was impatient to return to the crib-side of her offspring.

"Has Baby cried?" she asked of her brother, as she hurried out of her snowy wraps. "I've been gone longer than I thought I would."

"I—I haven't heard him," Roger answered in a manner peculiarly embarrassed. "Possibly he has, but I—eh—no, he hasn't cried."

Roger glanced appealingly at the figure of Mr. Bill Davis, his roommate, chum and fellow guest during the Christmas holidays in the Tupper home, but Mr. Davis was absorbed in his book and did not lift his eyes.

"Say, Bill," Roger pleaded in a hoarse whisper, after his sister had gone up stairs, "you tell her, won't you? You're a guest, and—and, she can't say much to you—"

Bill lowered his book and regarded his roommate with a cold and unimpressed eye.

"I like your nerve," he said finally. "Against my better judgment you insist on carrying out the diabolical joke of leaving a four-months' old infant on the doorsteps in a raging blizzard—"

"Diabolical nothing!" Roger interrupted. "The kid is used to sleeping out in snow-storms; Mabel's one of these fresh air fiends; it was a good deal warmer out on the porch than it was in the nursery."

"And then," Bill continued, ignoring the interruption, "you have the consummate nerve to ask me to spring the pleasant little surprise on your sister. Not much! Not for a large bundle of filthy lucre. Thank you kindly, but I decline. I told you that you were letting yourself in for it. The female of the species is not to be trifled with when her—"

"Aw, shut up!" Roger exclaimed. "How was I to know Lem had a guilty conscience? Why couldn't he have behaved like any other human being would have behaved? The idea of not recognizing his own kid. He's the poorest excuse for a man I ever



saw, anyhow. Mabel must have married him on a bet. He's the—"

Mr. Roger Merwin's pleasant dissertation on his brother-in-law was cut short by the loud and insistent ringing of an electric bell somewhere in the rear of the house. This was followed by the quick patter of footsteps on the stairs, and then excited voices overhead.

Had Mrs. Tupper, when an instant later she burst into the living room, been a bit less intent on reaching the telephone, she would have caught sight of two young men making a flying exit through the portieres which hid the dining room from view.

"Give me the police station, quick, quick!" the trembling practical jokers heard her cry out. "Hurry, oh, hurry, please, there's been a kidnapping—oh, the police station? Send an officer at once! My baby's been kidnapped! At once, do you hear? He's been stolen, I say! Oh, do be quick! Oh, 290 Elm Street—Mrs. Tupper's. My baby's been kidnapped!"

At the word "kidnapped," as though it were the cue for his entrance upon the scene, Lemuel Tupper stepped into the living room from the hall. He was somewhat agitated; in fact, his little side whiskers twitched with suppressed emotion, but his wife noticed nothing.

"Lemuel!" she shrieked, "baby's gone! Stolen! Kidnapped! What shall we do?"

"Gone!" her husband echoed weakly. "Stolen, kidnapped! What do you mean? How can he be gone?"

"He's stolen, I tell you—stolen! He was asleep in the nursery when I went

out; when I came back he was gone. Mary knows nothing about him; she hasn't been upstairs, thought he was still asleep. Oh, do something, for God's sake, do something; don't stand there staring like that!"

A great light had burst upon the intelligence of Mr. Tupper. He had carried his own son and heir to the police station! He had found that child on his front doorsteps together with a fiendishly incriminating note. His brother-in-law was a guest! The whole thing was laid bare. Roger Merwin's diabolical sense of humor was at the bottom of this affair; but how could he confess to Mabel that he had failed to recognize his own flesh and blood. That he had scarcely glanced at the infant would be no excuse; never, never would she be able to forgive him. Oh, the infernal scoundrel! the impudent, heartless cub! What vengeance would he not like to wreak upon this miserable brother-in-law of his? At the imminent risk of an apoplectic seizure, he managed to remain silent for a moment.

"Where," he asked, at last, "is that brother of yours?"

"I don't know; he was here a moment ago; but he doesn't know anything about it. I asked him when I came in if—Lemuel, you don't suppose! oh, he couldn't be so cruel!"

"He couldn't, eh? Well, that's just what has happened, and he's made a fool of me into the bargain!"

It was a hysterical Mrs. Tupper that, some moments later, snatched from the protecting arms of the law, her first-born.

"Thank you, sir," said the officer to



Mr. Tupper, as a yellow-backed bill changed hands—"not a word from me, sir, you can rely on it!"

He squeaked heavily to the front door, and turned, helmet in hand, for a parting pleasantry:

"'Tis a wise father, nowadays, that knows his own child; ain't it?"

Mr. Tupper entered the living room and stirred up the fire until there was a cheerful blaze. Then, with a guilty look over his shoulder, he removed from his pocket a note, the first words of which were: "Lem dear."

He tarried so long over the ceremony of burning the last scrap of this loathsome document that he failed to witness the unostentatious departure of his erstwhile guests.

"I wonder," Roger mused, as they slouched into an obscure corner of the railway station, "I wonder if he'll show that note to Mabel. I must ask her sometime."

"You," his friend commanded, "leave well enough alone! You have done quite a sufficiency. Enough is too much!"

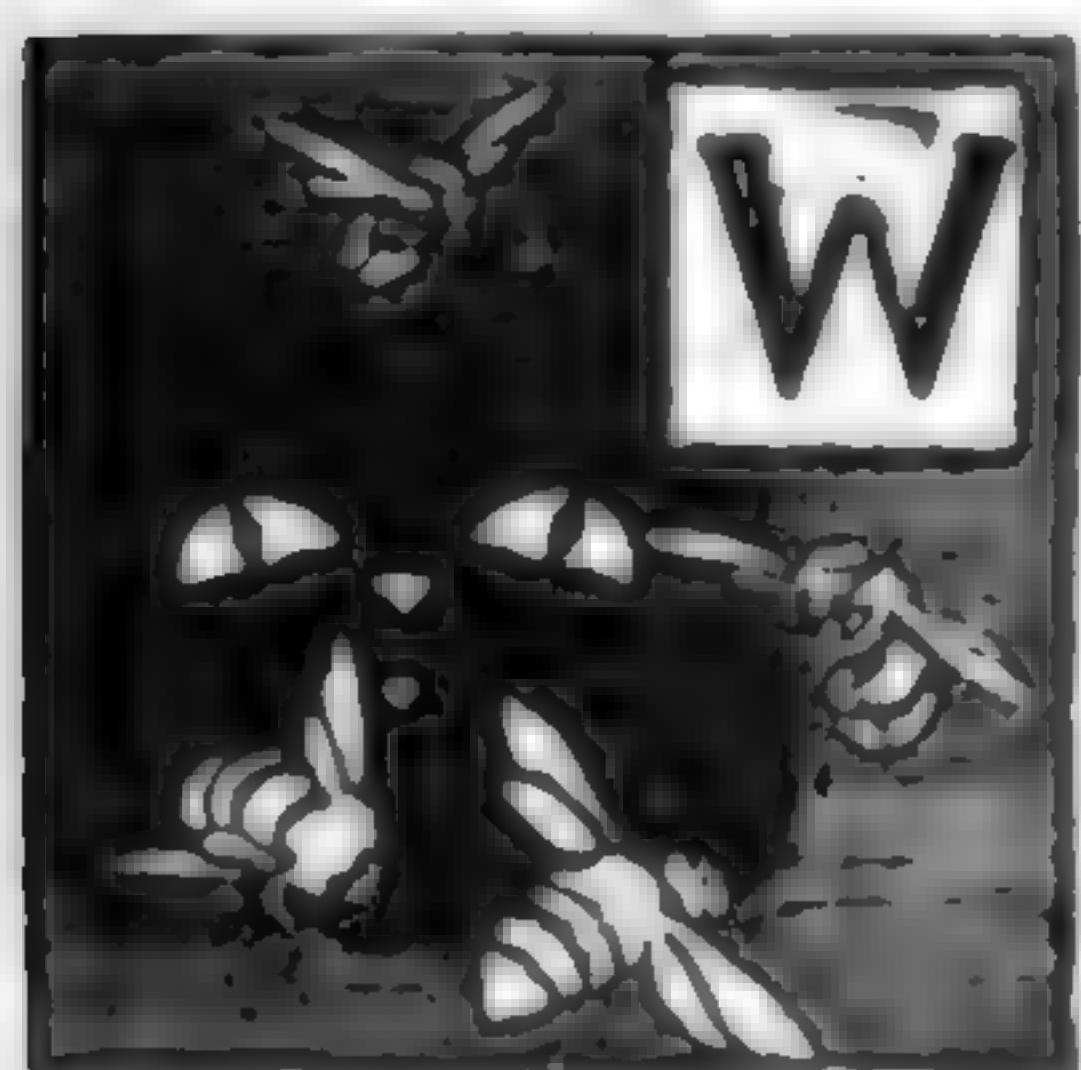




# The Last Spark

BY ROY ELLIS

*A man pays for his sin and comes out of prison to find the woman he loved waiting for him. But he had lost more than good years of his life behind the gray walls, and facing the situation, made the supreme sacrifice.*



WITH a muttered word that might have been either thanks or a curse, John Durkin, No. 14297, shuffled out of the warden's office and into the free world.

In his hand he clutched tightly the five dollar bill, which, with the ludicrously ill-fitting new suit and the squeaky new shoes that shouted "jail-bird!" at every step, was to be his stake for a new deal in the game of Life.

The morphine, for which Durkin had bartered to the corridor guard the last of his scanty cell ornaments, was beginning to die in him. This made him nervous and shaky; but he was not worried, for the guard had also given him the address of a little drug store, where his five hard-won dollars would purchase a week's supply of the stuff of dreams.

Nirvana for a week! And then—and then he would spin once more that vicious wheel, below which the net of the Law is ever spread to catch the weaklings as they fall.

Two blocks from the prison, Durkin began to hurry. His shuffling gait, product of many a lockstepped line, carried him along at a surprising pace. His lean, haggard face, with its tell-tale pallor, was set straight

ahead, his dull eyes introspective. Distrustful of his treacherous memory, he was mumbling over and over the address that the guard had given him—the goal that held for him the only hope life had to offer.

So intent was he that the cab driver had shouted twice before he realized that he was being addressed. Then he whirled with a startled cry, sick with the fear that the cat of State had her paw on him again—that he had only fancied he was free.

"Lady wants to speak to you," said the driver laconically, warping his craft up to the curb. The door swung open and a black-clad woman leaned out. Her face was heavily veiled.

"Gerald," she called softly.

The bowed figure on the sidewalk did not stir.

"Gerald Wade," she called again, and now there was a piteous note of uncertainty in her voice.

The man whom the prison register knew as "Durkin, 14297," shuffled slowly to the curb. His eyes were wide and staring, and his cheeks were blanched by a pallor more ghastly than the prison bleach.

With an eager gesture the woman pushed back the veil that concealed her face—a white, weary face, thin and grief-worn, but now radiant with the joy of faith justified.



The man's dull eyes were alight. "Margaret!" he cried, in a great voice, and made a step forward and raised his arms as if he would take her into them. Then he began to tremble; his arms dropped to his sides and the fire died out of his eyes. He shifted his gaze to the brown earth at his feet.

"I'm just out of prison," he said doggedly.

The woman smiled on him with brooding tenderness. "I know, dear boy, I know," she comforted him. "Sit down here beside me, Gerald."

He obeyed her like a child, and she spoke to the staring driver:

"An east-bound train is due in forty minutes. See that we don't miss it."

Then she turned to the broken man beside her and her eyes were bright with tears.

"Can you forgive me?" she asked softly. "Did you understand that I did my best?"

He stared at her stupidly. "I do not understand," he faltered. "What have I to forgive you?"

"I was your promised wife. Yet through all that weary year in prison—that first time—you had no visit from me; not even a message."

"But I was a convicted thief. I never expected—"

"Oh, but I tried!" she cried passionately. "I knew you did not mean to steal. I know you would have paid them back if they had given you a chance. And I knew, too, that what you did, foolish though it was, was done for me. If I had come to you when you wanted me, without insisting that you measure up to my

father's standards of wealth, everything would have been well with us. Gerald, the fault was more mine than yours."

"Hush, Margaret."

There was a subtle change in the man's appearance. The bowed shoulders had straightened. The hang-dog look was gone. It seemed not so unbelievable now, that he should have a name like other men: that he had once walked upright and unafraid; that a woman should have loved him.

"Five times," she swept on, "I contrived to get to the prison office. I begged them to let me see you; but my father had influence with the warden, and they sent me away. Many, many letters I wrote you. I found them unopened in my father's desk when he died. I planned to be at the prison gate to meet you when you were free; so they lied to me, told me that your sentence had been commuted and that you were already gone."

"If I had known! If I had dreamed that you still cared!"

"Cared?" She smiled at him through her tears. "Gerald, life stopped for me when I found that you had gone without a word. I think I was a little mad for a while. They took me abroad and were very gentle with me; but I could not forget. Then my father died and I came back to America, a rich woman and free. I found those poor comforting letters that you never saw, and then I understood. Oh, Gerald. I wanted you so!"

The man did not speak, but his eyes were glowing.



"I employed detectives; appealed to you through the personal columns of the great newspapers; offered rewards for any word of you; but for a long time I could find no trace. Then came a message from a man who had spent a night with you in a cheap lodging house, and there I picked up your trail. I was a happy woman that day. The man I loved was somewhere in the world and I knew that I should find him. Once, a year passed without progress; but I never lost faith. Yesterday I heard that you were here, and I came, scarce daring to hope that the search was ended. Gerald, dear, it has been nine years!"

She was crying quietly; not unhappily, but as one who finds joy too great to bear. The man lifted his scarred and calloused hand and patted her clumsily on the shoulder.

"And now?" he questioned huskily.

She smiled, and a little wave of color swept from throat to brow. "We will be married at once, if you like. We can live abroad, where no one has ever known us. We are rich, dear, and can follow our fancies. You must decide those things. All I can think of now is that I have found you again."

A pulse in the man's brain throbbed. He had a crazy impulse to shout, to sing. The loathsome life of the past nine years seemed like a horrible dream—a too vivid dream—from which he had been providentially awakened.

Through the cab window, he could see the brown, shriveled turf by the roadside, already quickening into life under the reviving touch of spring.

It seemed like a prophecy. Again he was Gerald Wade, with a future of ease and happiness before him. John Durkin—the striped, numbered thing—was merely a shuddering memory. He felt a rush of passionate gratitude to the woman whose love had wrought this miracle.

But as his eyes sought her, as his muscles flexed to draw her to him, came a tug at his nerve centres as insistent and arresting as a hand on his shoulder.

The Hab't, cheated for a while by the revival of old dreams, was again asserting itself. The craving would grow stronger, irresistible, until presently he would stoop to any foulness, commit any crime, to obtain the drug for which his tortured nerves cried out.

He had a sudden clear vision of what life with him would mean for the woman at his side. He saw the shattering of dreams, the pitiful clinging to faith, the slow breaking of her heart under the sordid evidence of his unworthiness. And he knew that it was too late for him to change. The evil years that had broken his body had warped his soul beyond any hope of straight, clean living.

Yet there remained a spark of nobility in his shriveled soul.

"Dear lady," he said, and his voice was very calm, though his face worked strangely, "the sight of you was like a glimpse of Paradise to one of the damned, and the memory of your goodness will be with me while I live; but I cannot permit this last sacrifice. The man you loved is dead. You do not know the creature who lives in his body."



She swayed toward him, her arms outstretched, and all the wonder of womanhood in her eyes.

He shrank from her touch, clinging desperately to his resolve.

"Ah, Margaret!" he cried brokenly, "you must know that such a marriage is impossible. I am worthless past telling; not even a high grade criminal; just flotsam on the sea of the underworld!"

She still smiled bravely and her eyes were soft with pity.

The man hesitated. He must go on; yet he had a curious shame in the next confession.

"That is not all," he faltered. "Margaret, I use drugs. I am a hopeless slave to morphine. Look at my eyes! See the dull mask of my face! See how my hands tremble! Even now I am mad for the stuff."

"Poor Gerald!" she sighed. Then she said brightly, "But we will cure that. We will have the best doctors, the happiest surroundings. And after all, it is only a foolish habit. I care for none of these things—only that you love me."

He looked at her hopelessly. He had tried and failed, and the lure of her sweet lips and yearning arms made him faint with longing.

Well, he would try again; he would cut deep, that she might be spared a greater suffering.

"Love you?" he questioned, and his smile was a leer. "I tell you, you don't know men like me. You never did know me—not even in the old days. Oh, I wanted to marry you then, and of course I'm grateful to you now. But tastes change in nine years, my dear girl."

She drew away from him, startled, tremulous. It was a bitter thing to kill the light in her eyes.

"You say I stole for you," he cackled. "That is a very funny joke; but we'll let it pass."

He flashed a glance at her. She crouched weakly on the cab seat, as far away from him as the narrow limits of the vehicle would permit. Her hands were at her throat, her face as white as paper.

"God!" she cried in a piteous voice, "and all these years I have searched for you!"

The cab drew up at the station and the man threw open the door and sprang out. His ghastly face grinned up at her.

"Come on to the preacher, if you like. I suppose I owe you that much." He chuckled horribly. "Come on," he jeered, "don't keep the bridegroom waiting."

She looked on him with loathing unspeakable; and the soul of Gerald Wade was very glad, for he saw that the fight was won.

"Oh, go!" she panted, tearing with fluttering hands at the bosom of her dress. "Here is money. Here is the ring you gave me. Take them, and for God's sake go!"

A roll of bills and a jeweled circlet fell in the dust at his feet. Then the cab door closed, and the driver, at a word from within, drove to the other side of the station.

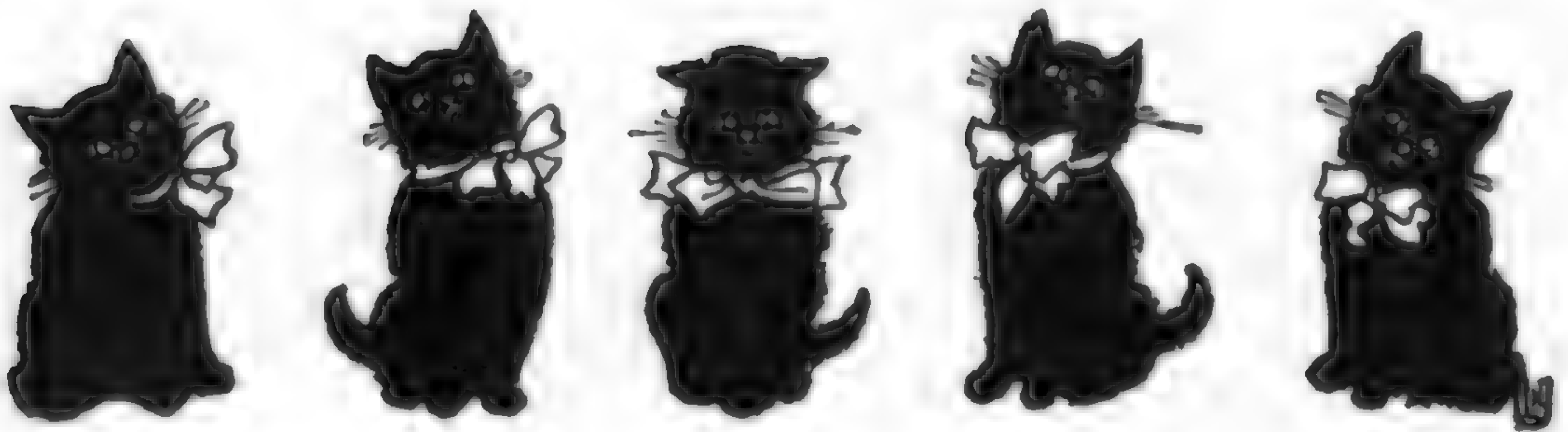
The man stood, a bowed, shrunken figure, staring at the ground. Presently, he stopped and picked up the objects at his feet. The ring he slipped into his pocket, the money he fumbled uncertainly.



"There was once a man named Gerald Wade," he reflected, "who would have starved rather than use this money. Gerald Wade, however, is dead. There is no reason why John Durkin should be so fastidious."

He shuffled away from the station.

Soon he was hurrying, his haggard face with its tell-tale pallor set straight ahead, his dull eyes introspective. Over and over he mumbled the address that the prison guard had given him—the goal that held for him the only hope Life had to offer.





# The Strange Case of Double Infancy

BY CHARLES SHERWOOD RICKER

*With the laboratory as a background, you see a startling experiment with cell-life and more startling results.*



I lacked about eight minutes of midnight when I was aroused by the soft jingle of the ward 'phone. I had evidently been dozing, for before I could get across the hall to answer the first ring, there came a second. I took down the receiver a little disappointed, for I had been up nearly all of the previous night and had hoped to get to bed in fairly good season, but a midnight call nearly always means emergency and consequent hard work.

The voice on the 'phone I readily recognized. It was old Doctor Comstock.

"Is that you, Vedrine?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied.

"I have a case that I must bring in at once and get on the table," he continued. "The man is slowly bleeding to death, and while there isn't much chance of our stopping the hemorrhage, it's worth the try."

"Very well," I answered, "I will have things ready for you," and hung up the receiver.

I sent the hospital ambulance to the address Doctor Comstock had given, and set about preparing things for the patient's coming. A half hour later, Doctor Comstock arrived, bringing with him an emaciated look-

ing man, not over thirty years old, who appeared to be in the last stages of tuberculosis. The man was unconscious when brought in.

Doctor Comstock explained to me, as the attendants were preparing for the operation, that this man had, only a few years before, completed his studies in a New York medical school, and had received an appointment at the Bellevue Hospital. Owing to ill-health he had given up his work after a little over a year's service, and had returned to his home in Belmont.

Here the man had outfitted himself with a small laboratory and, whenever his health permitted, carried on experimental work that he had begun at college. While no one knew what this experimental work was, for he had been more or less secretive about it, it was generally thought to be concerned with some aspect of blood analysis. The gossip of the town had even gone so far as to say that the frequency of his hemorrhages had led him to carry on this blood analysis with the idea of working out some formula that he might use to replenish his own loss of blood. He had not even taken his family into his confidence.

Before the doctor had proceeded further with his narrative, one of the attendants came in and announced



that everything was in readiness for the operation.

It was a losing fight that was fought that night, for the hemorrhage was well within the lungs, and operative interference was impossible. Shortly after five the following morning, the man died without regaining consciousness.

Doctor Comstock had left a little over an hour before without telling me more of this story which had begun to arouse my interest. It was months afterwards when, as assistant superintendent in a neighboring hospital for the insane, I again met Doctor Comstock, and inquired about the young man whom he had brought in that night.

For a moment, he did not seem to recall the incident to which I referred. I mentioned some details and then he remembered.

"Ah, yes," he replied. "Didn't I ever tell you the whole of that story?"

"No," I answered, "and I have wondered many times since then, inasmuch as the man had been so secretive about his work, just what he might have been doing."

Doctor Comstock replied that he would be glad to tell me, and suggested, as the story was a long one, that I take dinner with him on the following Sunday night. This I promised to do.

It seems that Doctor Comstock had been more interested in this experimental work than I had surmised. And Comstock has always been considered a very canny sort of an individual, but the story he told me that night would have led anyone

who knew less than I, to believe that he was listening to the dreams of a dreamer.

We had finished dinner, and leaving Mrs. Comstock on the plea that we wished to smoke, went into the doctor's study.

"Well," said the doctor, as he lighted his pipe, "I have been intending to put this strange tale about young Rollins into a monograph, but it is such a weird story and savors so of the unbelievable that I have been waiting until I receive some reports from the medical experts who are testing the material I gave them.

"You will remember that I told how secretive this man was in all his work," continued the doctor, "and that even his father and mother were unfamiliar with the interior or contents of the laboratory that had been built for him, practically, one might say, in his back-yard. The building was always kept under lock and key, and the greater part of the time the young man slept in the little building.

"I have known the Rollins family a good many years and had taken care of the boy from infancy. So, after the first intense feelings of grief had passed, I had a long talk with his father and mother, and we made a thorough examination of the laboratory at the same time.

"Well, it was a hard experience to put the old folks through after their loss. They little suspected what had been going on in the little building in the yard. From conversation which the boy had had with his parents, and from a note-book and other memoranda which we found around the laboratory, we pieced out a strange



story. There is undoubtedly a love story which should be woven into the experience of this young man, but about that we can only guess.

"Not long after his appointment to Bellevue, he took charge of the nervous out-patient work, and among the visitors were two women—an elderly woman and her daughter. The mother was suffering from Potts' disease; and while Rollins was able to relieve her, he was, of course, unable to stave off the ultimate progress and final outcome of the disease. About a year and a half after the first visit of the couple, Rollins was called to a dingy tenement on Eighty-seventh Street, not far from Third Avenue, and found the old lady within a few hours of death.

"It seems apparent that he would not have left the hospital to go down there merely to relieve the final suffering of the poor woman, when he knew as well as you and I that there were a dozen men in the Emergency Department that he could have called on for the work.

"We found quite a bit of correspondence between the young woman and Rollins, the general trend of which showed that she was anxious to repay the young physician for what he had done for her mother. Several letters were devoted to an effort on her part to get Rollins to accept a money-order for ten dollars which she had sent him and he had returned. Then, there were appointments arranged, and the old gentleman and I figured that the couple must have met a good many times.

"At one of these meetings, as later developments proved, Rollins con-

fided the story of his experimental work and his dreams. Finally he accepted her offer to act as the subject of his experiments. These are the facts I was able to gather from letters and memoranda.

"I shall never forget the spectacle that greeted us as we opened the door inside the short hall leading to the main room of Rollins's laboratory. As I opened the door, a positive maze of glass tubes flashed in the sunlight which flooded the big airy room. I have seen many pieces of chemical apparatus that were very complex, but I have never seen anything to compare with this. After the first glare of the glass tubes and the consequent confusion had left me, I began to realize that this network of tubing started in one part of the room and crossed to the other, entering a long box about two feet wide and six or seven feet in length. The box itself, as I glanced at it, seemed to be of ordinary wooden structure with a glass top and many openings at the side, through which these glass tubes passed.

"Mr. Rollins, Sr., and I, entered the room and began to investigate. I walked over to the wall and commenced a cursory examination of the retorts and bottles that marked the starting-point for the majority of the tubes. I had pulled the stopper from one of the bottles and was gingerly smelling the contents, when a sharp cry of horror from the old gentleman caused me to turn. He stood by the long box, his eyes bulging and his features ashen.

"I rushed across the room and gazed down through the glass top.



I understood the man's surprise and horror, when, through the network of tubes in the box itself, I saw the form of an infant, about three months of age, I should judge. The situation slowly began to dawn on me as I stood there gazing at the strange spectacle. The child had not been dead long. I tried, though in vain, to revive any possible spark of life in the little form by starting the Bunsen burners under the retorts on the bench by the wall. A further examination of the bottles and test-tubes told me of the strong blood and heart stimulants that had been passing along these tubes, and that through others, chemical foods had been introduced.

"The old man voiced my own thoughts. His voice trembled as he said in a low tone, 'His child—his child!' He paused to control his feelings, and then said:

"'For God's sake, don't tell his poor mother. She's broken-hearted now; it might kill her.' The old gentleman was completely unnerved. I finally induced him to sit down and I continued the investigation.

"As I commenced again to rummage around, I began to wonder what had become of the woman and whether we could get in touch with her. 'He must have sent her away,' I thought, 'and perhaps there is some scrap of correspondence which will give a clue.' I spied the chest of drawers over on the back wall and started a systematic search. Rollins moved his chair over to that side of the room and sat down beside me.

"The two upper drawers yielded nothing intelligible. The third

drawer was locked. I broke it open. It contained four bundles, each neatly wrapped in white paper. I picked up the one nearest at hand and opened it. I must confess that I was somewhat startled when I pulled out various articles of under-clothing which obviously belonged to a woman. I hated to look at the old gentleman, for I knew his thoughts from the sharp breath that I heard him draw as I opened the bundle. I turned to the others. The second revealed a pair of shoes done up in an old torn petticoat—the third contained a waist, and the fourth a dark blue serge skirt.

"Rollins jumped to his feet. 'He's killed her—he's killed her—my God! my God! my boy has committed murder!' The old man sank back into the chair, and the tears streamed down his face. I tried to tell him that this clothing did not necessarily indicate murder, though I honestly feared it. I told him that possibly the woman had died, giving birth to the child, and that he had secretly buried the body to save the family disgrace; or that the woman might not be dead at all—that this might be extra clothing that she had put away before she left. He was inconsolable, however, and I decided that the rest of the investigation had better be carried on alone. I began to pick up the clothing and replace it in the drawer, when I saw pinned to the skirt an envelope."

Doctor Comstock stopped his narrative for a moment and took his wallet from his pocket. He drew out an old soiled envelope.

"This," he said, holding it up to the



light, "was what I found." He pulled out the sheet and began to read:

"Dear Father:—Fearing that these hemorrhages, which seem to be getting worse rather than better, may catch me unaware sometime, or that you might become curious and misunderstand this work that I have been carrying on here, I have put this letter in a place where I felt that it would be found if you started to investigate, but would be safe otherwise. I have practically proved the old theory which every medical man knows, that the process which we call old age takes place between birth and the twenty-fifth year. Old Doc. Comstock or any physician, will tell you about the curious cell growth of the human, and will tell you why medical men have believed this theory. They have always said that if this cell decay, which we commonly call growth, could be stopped, we would approximate something akin to perpetual life, or at least prolong life until the principal organs of the body wore out.

"But, to stop this cell life of the body would, as every one knows, cause death. The problem was to change this process in the cells—to reverse it if possible, and this I have succeeded in doing. The infant in the box was a woman twenty years of age. My note book and letters that I have saved will tell enough to substantiate my story, and the enclosed statement of the young woman herself tells the rest.

"Don't let the burners go out. If it is too late when you read this letter, save the retorts and test tubes at all costs. Give them to Comstock

with this letter. He will know what to do.' Signed, 'Bert.' And here is the other," continued Comstock.

"To whom it may concern: This is to say that I voluntarily gave myself up to experimentation by Dr. Albert Rollins, and I fully realize the possible results. Doctor Rollins performed a great service for me and my mother when she was suffering from an incurable disease. This debt of gratitude I wished to repay. When the normal opportunities of payment had been denied me, and I learned something of the work of Doctor Rollins and its value to humanity if successful, I begged to be allowed to give myself for the experiment. If it fails—it doesn't matter, for I have no kin to mourn my loss, and little to live for.' Signed, 'Mabel Hamilton.'

"There—there are the facts."

"That is a weird story," I said; "but what was the outcome?"

"Well," resumed the doctor, "I set about to analyse the chemicals, and soon found myself in the realm of organic chemistry that I know little or nothing about, and fearing that I might waste the small amount of material that I had, I have turned the whole problem over to Doctor Friedrichs at the Medical School, and have placed the infant in the hands of Doctor Wallace for microscopic examination of the cell structure.

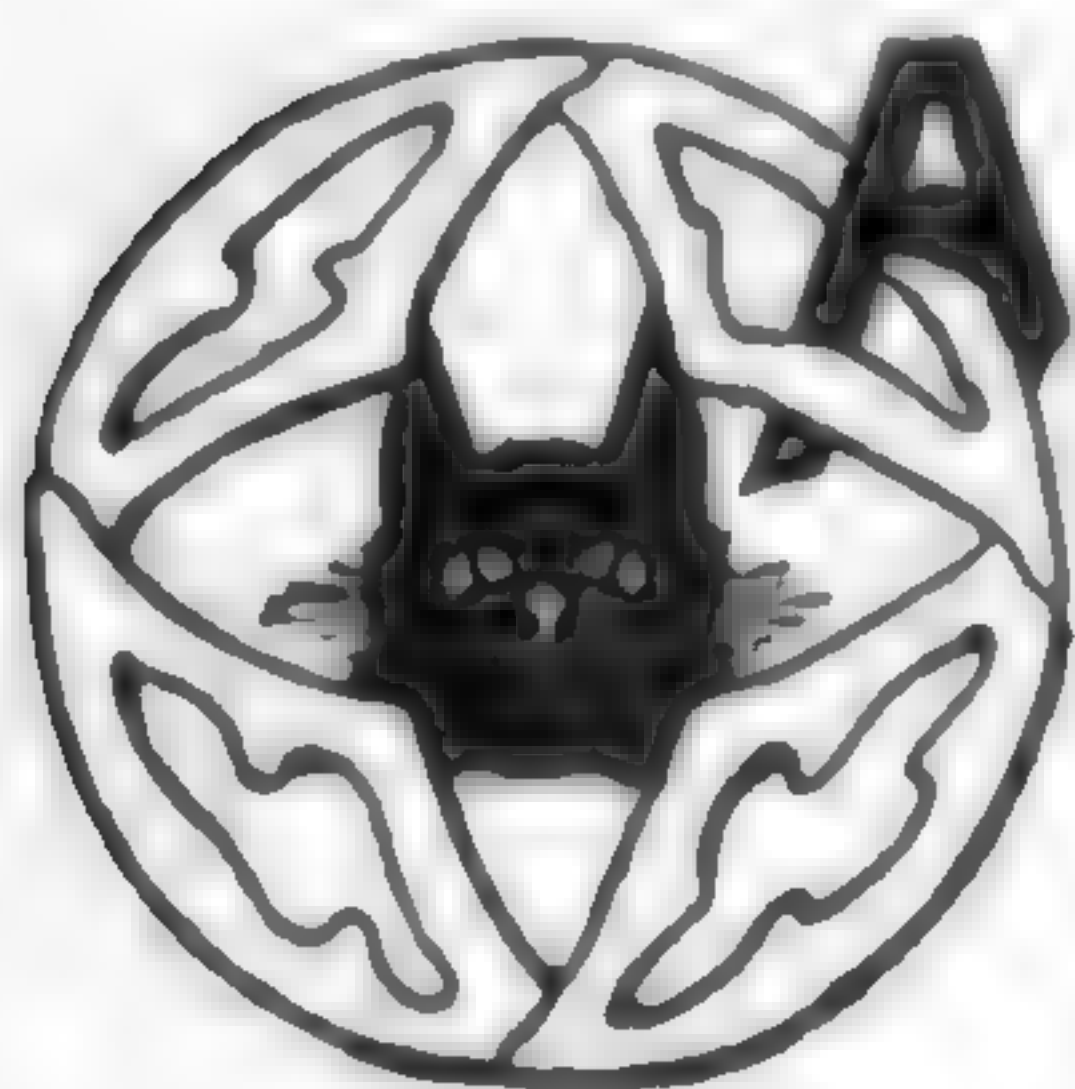
"Rollins has done a wonderful piece of work and, even if Friedrichs and Wallace fail at this time to lay bare the whole secret, they have already learned enough to make matters fairly simple for an ultimate solution."



# The Empty Room

BY C. CLEVES MACKIE

*Four millionaires "set-in" for a game of cards in a private room of their club. A darkey servant guards a door, the only known exit from the card room. When the door is forced open the players are gone.*



At nine o'clock that evening, Mr. Alexander Drake led the way into a little card room on the third floor of the Unity Club, and having settled himself with three friends around a table under the central light, he slipped a crisp greenback into the tingling palm of Timpkins, and bade him stand guard outside the closed door.

At nine-fifteen, Timpkins was ordered to bring a fresh pack of cards, and the four men settled down to a sober rubber of whist.

At nine-thirty, Timpkins brought liquid refreshments as per request. At ten o'clock, he brought more refreshments of the same character. It was exactly ten-thirty when he barred the doorway against the entrance of another servant.

"Ah'm sorry, Ferdinand, but Mistah Drake's orders is dat no one am to enter dat room till he's finished playin' cyards," said Timpkins, regretfully.

Ferdinand, who was new to the staff, rolled the white of an eye toward the forbidden room.

"Am dat gentleman de milyunair whut dey's all talkin' about?" he whispered.

Timpkins nodded loftily.

"Dat am Milyunair Drake," he admitted; "and whut's more, boy, dere's three more milyunairs shut up in dat little room! I expect dey's as much as two hundred milyun in dere!"

"Golly!" gasped Ferdinand. "Is dey got it all wid 'em?"

Timpkins smiled tolerantly.

"I reckon not. It's Mistah Drake's buthday and he's been dinin' his fren's in de private banquet room; seems like he wouldn't play cyards nowhere but in dis yere little room; and dey cain't nobody enter till dey goes out. I'se heah on gyard."

"I spect you ain't doin' it foh nothin'," murmured Ferdinand enviously, as he moved away.

By way of response, Timpkins crackled the crisp greenback.

Presently the elevator disgorged a merry quartette of club members who made at once for the little card room which Timpkins was guarding.

Timpkins lifted a deprecating black hand.

"I'se sorry, gentlemen, but de room is occupied!"

"That's bally hard luck!" groaned a stout, ruddy-faced man. "This is my last try for a place to have a quiet game. Come on down to the Exor, boys."

The elevator arose and yawned to receive them again, and then dropped to the lower floor.



Timpkins shifted his weary feet and wished the millionaires would go home.

"Tain't respectable ~~for~~ a lot of dem gran'father old men to sit up to all hours gamblin' dere milyuns away," he muttered pœvishly.

At that moment a stout fussy little man paused before the door. Timpkins began his apologetic remonstrance, but the fussy little man brushed the negro aside and opened the door of the little card room. He looked inside and then turned a wrathful face to the servant.

"How dare you tell me that the room is occupied when it is empty?" he roared. "I shall report you at once."

As he pattered toward the elevator, Timpkins slid around the doorway and poked his woolly head into the room.

It was empty.

The four card players had vanished. A strong light shone down upon a litter of cards and empty glasses on the table, a box of choice cigars and brass smoking trays. The air was heavy with dead tobacco smoke, and there was no sign of the four millionaires.

Timpkins stared hard. "I ain't been asleep, dat's a fac'," he muttered in bewilderment; "and dey ain't but one doah and de windows air all locked fas' and tight."

While Timpkins still gaped at the empty room, Bently, the house manager, arrived with the fussy fat man who was complaining bitterly of the wretched service at the club.

"I shall bring this matter before the board of directors, sir," he fumed,

as they reached the card-room door.

"I'm sure there is some mistake, Mr. Smithers," soothed Bently, as he laid a strong hand on Timpkins's coat-tail and jerked the discomfited menial into the corridor. "Now, see here, Timpkins," he said sternly, "I want to know why you told Mr. Smithers that the card room was occupied when it was not?"

"Befo' de Lord, Mistah Bently, I ain't stirred from dis doah—it happened disaway—" and Timpkins related at great length, the incidents of the evening, from the moment when Mr. Drake had enlisted his services as guardian of the card-room door and riveted the bargain with a five-dollar bill, to the instant when Mr. Smithers had discovered the empty room.

"You've been asleep," decided the manager sharply.

But Timpkins repeated his story again and again, until Bently, and even the skeptical Smithers, were inclined to believe him.

"They are in some other room," said Bently at last, although he admitted that the only exit from the card room was the door which Timpkins had guarded, and he made a thorough search of the rambling club building which had been remodeled from a block of brownstone dwellings.

At midnight the club manager, his assistants, and the entire staff of servants, knew that something was wrong in that ancient and exclusive organization.

Four prominent men had mysteriously disappeared from a closed room and left no clue behind them. The



check boy in the coat room reported that the missing gentlemen had not called for their hats and overcoats, and the doorkeeper swore that they had not passed his portal. No one had seen Alexander Drake and his three friends from the moment when they had entered the little card room.

Bently studied the litter of cards on the table, and declared the game had been abandoned at a most interesting point.

Granted that the players had lost interest in the game, how could they have disappeared from the room? There were no signs of a struggle unless one noticed that a picture on one wall hung rather awry. Bently straightened it, and made a mental note to have the picture hung higher, where it would be out of the way.

At two o'clock, having received an anxious inquiry from Mr. Drake's valet, who was waiting up for his master and his guests, Bently telephoned to a private detective agency. It was the manager's duty to see that the matter did not get into the papers.

In a short time appeared a foxy little man from the agency, Rennard by name, who nosed around the building, catechised every one on the premises, and finally confided to Bently that in his opinion the four millionaires had been murdered, their bodies disposed of in some mysterious way, and that the murderer was still in the house.

"But who in creation could commit such a crime with Timpkins on guard at the door?" asked Bently wearily.

Rennard smiled in a superior manner. "Why, Timpkins, of course!" he retorted triumphantly.

In spite of Bently's protests, the terrified Timpkins was carried off to be privately interviewed, and later to be held as a suspicious character in the matter of the disappearance of Alexander Drake and his friends.

When Rennard and his prisoner had departed, the telephone bell rang sharply. A thin voice came crisply over the wire:

"Unity Club? This is the *Morning Star* office. Please connect me with someone who can tell me about the attempted robbery at the club this morning."

"Go to the devil!" was Bently's misleading direction as he slammed the receiver on its hook.

An hour earlier, while Detective Rennard still searched for clues within, something was happening around on the Thirty-seventh Street side of the club.

Policeman Dennis Breen, on fixed post at the corner, detached himself from the pavement to ease his aching feet with a little stroll in the dark shadow of the building.

Suddenly, before his very eyes, the pavement yawned and disgorged a human being.

Dennis Breen's arm was strong, and his hand was heavy upon the collar of the individual whom he jerked up out of the coal hole and thumped violently upon the sidewalk. In a trice the man's wrists were handcuffed. All this time he had uttered no sound.

"Any more of yez?" hissed Breen, and receiving no reply he bellowed the question down the coal hole.

From the sooty depths below the



Unity Club building, there came an exceedingly bitter cry.

Breen leaped to his signal box, summoned aid, and went back to his silent prisoner.

Fifteen minutes later, when the patrol wagon backed up to the door of the police station, four prisoners were escorted before the sergeant while officer Breen made a charge against them.

When they were searched, it was discovered that beneath the layer of soft-coal dust that covered them from head to foot and rendered their features indistinguishable, each one wore evening clothes. Some handsome jewelry was removed from them, and they were hustled into four cells.

The sergeant flicked some coal dust from his fingers, and examined the articles which had been removed from the prisoners. There were four diamond rings, four thin gold watches, four wallets containing cards and fat rolls of money. Everything was grimy with coal dust.

"Call the Unity Club and see if anyone is up there," he ordered.

Later, when Bently stamped in, indignant at being disturbed from a nap he was enjoying on his office sofa, he glared at the sergeant.

"Burglars at the club?" he snorted incredulously. "You'll have to show me! First I've heard about it—unless they've kidnapped four bald-headed millionaires who disappeared this evening."

"There are four of the chaps, and desperate-looking fellows at that—they could have a millionaire apiece and not worry! Breen, bring the prisoners in."

When they appeared, the manager of the Unity Club stared at them with puzzled eyes.

They were desperate-looking characters indeed, giving outward evidence of the coal heap from which they had been dragged. Black from head to foot, with only the whites of their eyes showing oddly under the sooty lashes, they looked like members of a minstrel troupe.

They were rather small and wiry individuals, but there was a grimness about their bearing that hinted of strength in reserve. Secrecy locked their lips.

Bently stared at them, and the four suspects gave him back stare for stare, almost impudently.

"Gentlemen Raffles—all," remarked the sergeant facetiously.

A sickly grin overspread the manager's face. He turned to the sergeant.

"These gentlemen," he explained slowly, "are guests of the club. As such, they had a perfect right to leave the clubhouse by any of its exits. If they chose the coal hole that's their affair. Of course your men are to be commended for doing their duty—and I can assure you that they will not go unrewarded. I will vouch for these gentlemen, Sergeant." Here Bently winked at the sergeant, and that official handed over the valuables he had gleaned from the prisoners, and Bently went away with his charges.

After they had passed the open-mouthed watchman, and were on their way up the stairs to the baths on the top floor, Alexander Drake took a roll of bills from his



pocket and turned to the manager.

"By the way," he said, "just give this to Timpkins, will you, please?"

"Timpkins," said Bently sourly, "will not be in until morning; he's held under suspicion of having committed four murders!"

And he could have sworn that four pair of shoulders shook as the grimy men plodded toward the stairway.

The next morning, Timpkins was summoned to assist the manager, who was in the third-floor card room with a workman.

"Just lift down this picture, Timpkins," said Bently, and as the servant removed it from its position low down on the wall, there was disclosed an opening two feet square. From the opening a polished chute led down into darkness.

"'Scuse me, sah," said Timpkins respectfully, "but might I ask whah dat hole goes to?"

"That hole, Timpkins," said Bently patiently, "is an abandoned laundry chute. This part of the clubhouse was once a private dwelling, and the chute has never been closed. I am now having it nailed up in case some club member, smitten with sentimental memories of his boyhood days spent in this same house, might try to repeat a boyish stunt and recklessly slide down the laundry chute to the soiled clothes basket in the laundry in the cellar."

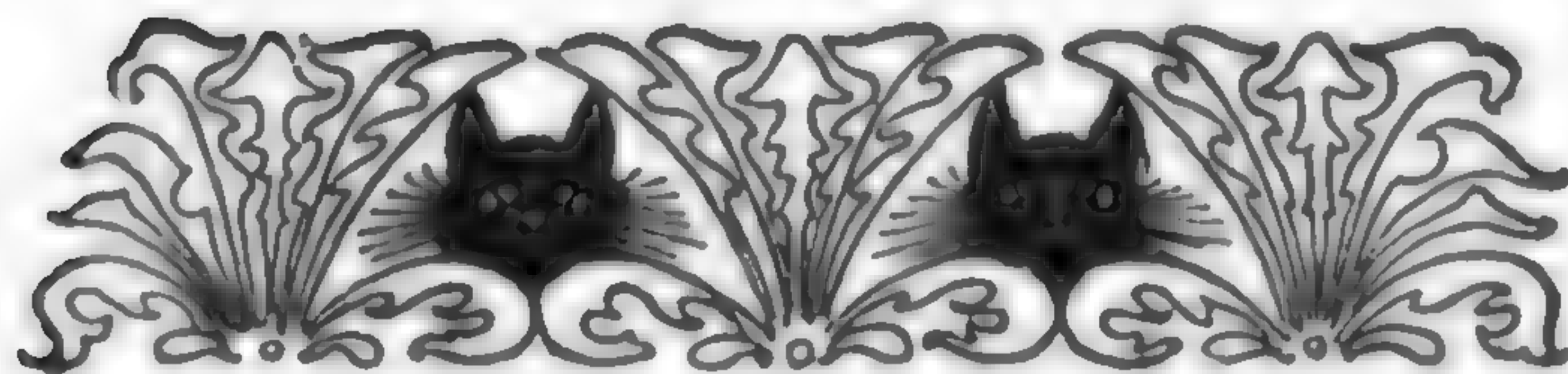
"And what would happen if dey did do dat?" gasped Timpkins.

Bently smiled grimly.

"They would land up to their necks in soft coal and probably be pinched by the police," he explained.

Timpkins thrust a hand in his pocket, brought out a wad of soiled bills and fingered them pensively.

"I wondered how dat money got all kivered with coal dust," he said simply.

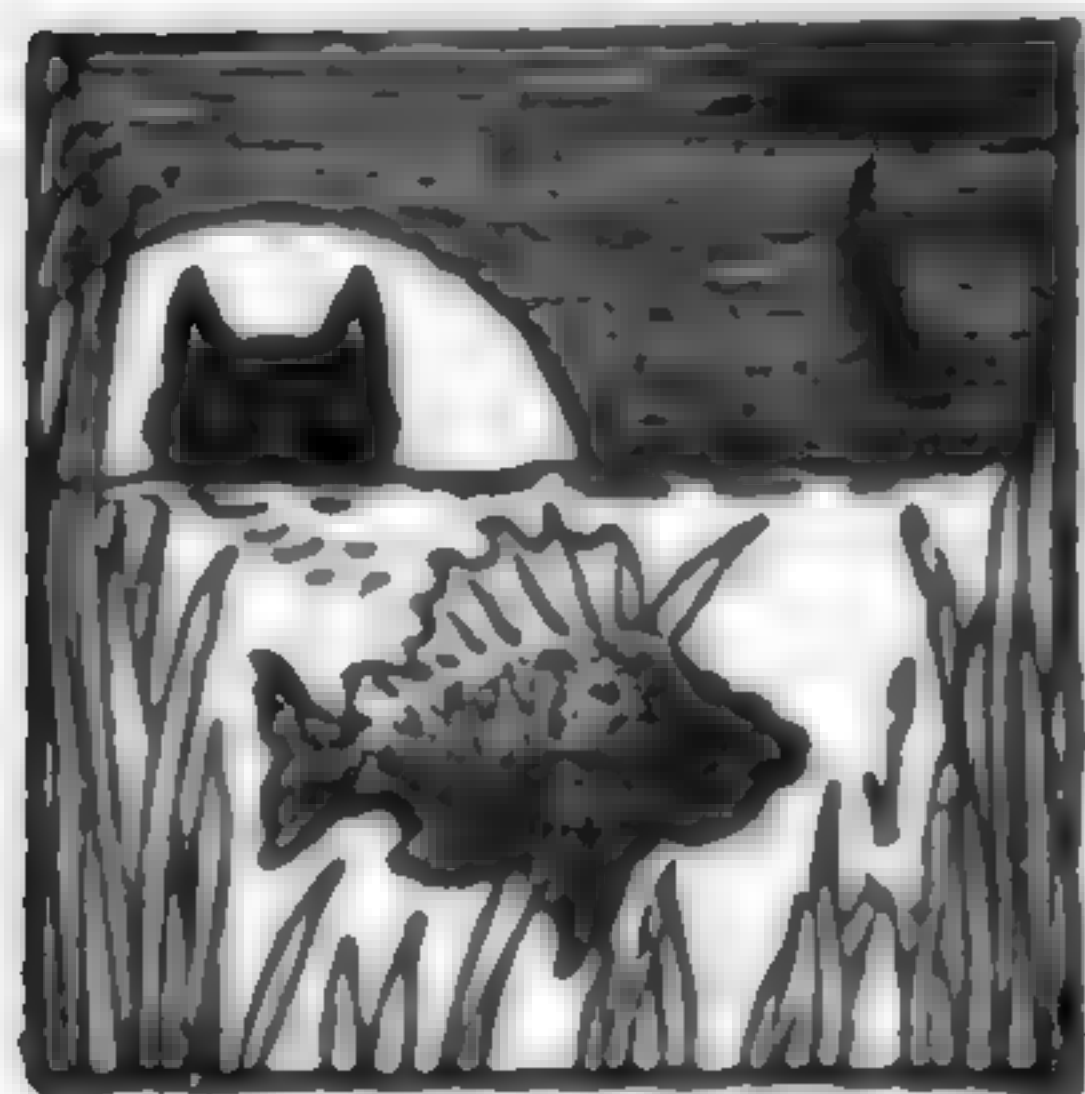




# The Fingers of Death

BY STIRLING WILSON

*Many strange tales have come up from the sea but few more weird than this story of a sea bully's punishment and death.*



HERE is horror enough on land, with its desolate gulches and roaring dark forests, but far worse, I say, is the clutching terror of the sea, with the heartless loneliness of it all. It's man to man there under the empty sky; and the men on the phantom ships below are always singing their harbinger of death in the still nights. I've always found it so.

I had signed as second mate on the schooner *Christie*, and I'll say for her that a neater, tighter little craft never skipped out of Glasgow Harbor. Her captain—may the saints pity him—was a fiend if ever one trod a deck. He was known from Calcutta to Brazil as a devil and a driver, and his crews, poor dogs, were always made up of deserters from the service and sulking derelicts without souls, who would sail a ship to hell for a glass of rum.

How could I know MacDougall? I was far off my usual course in Glasgow, with not a berth in sight; so when the old man offered me a chance as second mate I couldn't sign quick enough.

We were bound for Jamaica with a cargo of wool, and we got under way with a bowling wind behind us

that lasted well out to sea. Everything was trim, and it looked to be a good run. The crew mustered nine men, five of them Scots, two Swedes, one Englishman and one Portuguese; an unlikely lot they were, too, but tolerable seamen.

Besides the old man, the mate and myself, there was a boy to wait on the table in the after cabin, and to save the officers from dirty work, I reckon. I've sailed with men of every country, but I couldn't name the land that cabin-boy came from, and he wasn't telling. He was the most silent, hermit-like human I ever saw on board ship. You'll find a lot like that ashore, but you'd think the loneliness and hard life afloat would draw them out, but not him. He didn't give any odds, and he wasn't asking any, (not that he would have been likely to get any mercy on a ship of old man MacDougall's.)

I never knew the boy's name. The whole crew called him "Pedro." He might have been sixteen or forty, for all we knew and for all he said about it. He had a thin grey face with a sharp, knife-like nose, and parchment skin. His lips were thin and white, and were always writhing and licking in a horrible leer, which was a thousand times worse on account of a paralysis of one eye, which would suddenly slip out of focus with the



other, and then slip back again.

In spite of his evil looks and disposition, he might have got by without arousing any particular wonder, if it hadn't been for his left hand, which had but three fingers. They hadn't been cut off, either; he was born that way, and it seemed as if his fingers had grown and his hand hadn't, for his hand was small and shriveled, whereas his fingers were long and hairy. It resembled the talon of some monster bird of prey, and he had a peculiar habit of holding the hand on his chest, just below his throat, and twisting and stretching those fingers until it made your flesh creep to watch him.

I've never seen a more repulsive human. No wonder he couldn't feel sociable with other men. To see him sneaking about the decks, his feet making no more noise than a cat's, and his face darting up sideways to give a glimpse of his weird face, and his crippled hand busy at his throat, reminded you of some strange, ghoulish animal that you didn't dare turn your back on.

I remember once waking up suddenly from a sound sleep, after a hard watch, and finding that leering death's head staring at me, ten feet away. I started up in a cold sweat and cursed him out of the cabin, but I couldn't sleep any more that night.

Even MacDougall, who was said to fear nothing on God's earth, didn't relish that cabin-boy. He seldom beat or kicked him, and the boy probably got less ill-treatment than any one of the men forward, who all knew the weight of the old man's fist before we had been out a day. However, Mac-

Dougall took it out in cursing him, and the more indifferent Pedro seemed to the captain's oaths, the more fervently he was cursed. The captain took a barbarous delight in devising oaths to torment the boy on his weird appearance and especially about his claw of a hand.

When the poor wretch came within range of the captain's curses, he displayed no feeling, unless it was that his lips twisted a little more than usual and the three fingers writhed more feverishly than ordinarily.

As I said, the voyage promised to be a good one, and Mr. Matthews, the mate, and I, were congratulating ourselves on the uneventfulness of the log, when, four days out of Glasgow, the captain began drinking, and from then on it was a different ship—a floating hell.

There is nothing worse than a drunken skipper, especially if he is a man of MacDougall's type. Matthews and I saw trouble ahead and we ventured to argue with him, but we might as well have talked to the phosphorescence in our wake. He looked at us for a minute out of his sot's eyes, and then told us to mind our own business. He was captain on his own ship and he'd brook no interference from a couple of lubberly upstarts. So we gave up trying to remonstrate with him, and hoped for good winds and a quick run to the Indies.

One morning the captain staggered aft to the cabin after his watch was up. The wind was blowing fairly hard, and coming as it was, in gusts and flaws, it was a hard job to keep the ship from losing headway. The



rain had been coming down in torrents all night, and MacDougall had resorted pretty often to the rum, so by morning he was very drunk and very irritable.

As he lurched down the companionway, he tripped over Pedro, who was unfortunate enough to have gone to sleep just at the foot of the ladder. The captain turned around, cursing, and kicked the boy with his heavy sea boot. Pedro sprang up, grimacing as usual, and holding his side. I reckon some of his ribs must have been broken. The captain kicked him again, knocking him against the cabin wall, where he crouched without a sound, feeling his throat with his lame hand. He didn't say a word or utter a groan, but the leer on his face was unearthly.

The captain looked at him for a minute and then turned away; Pedro crept noiselessly up the ladder. After that he was pretty careful to give the old man a wide berth, and the latter, being always drunk, didn't go out of his way to molest him. The boy grew weaker, and also thinner, if that could be. I tried to get him to let me look at his injury, but he just snarled at me and limped away, so I let him alone. He never took his eyes off the captain when he was within sight of him, but followed him with a look that can't be expressed. It was too strong for hate; it was a kind of inhuman eagerness, like that of a snake. If MacDougall hadn't been too drunk to see, he might well have feared it.

As luck would have it, Pedro chanced to come within reach of the old man when the latter was just fighting drunk. Before he could get

out of the way, the captain had knocked him down and kicked him into the scuppers, where he lay motionless.

He was such a hulk of skin and bones before, that I was looking for serious consequences if MacDougall should beat him up again. I walked over to the spot, and was pretty well wrought up to find that Pedro would never get up again. The ship fell off a point just then, and the moonlight got down into the dark spot where he lay; and I saw the most shivering sight that ever blasted a man's eyes.

That hideous face, spattered with blood, and blue as my coat, was contorted into an expression that makes my blood turn cold to think on. It was a look that I'll swear was never seen on a man's face before.

I started back when I saw it, and I could feel the hair rising on my cold scalp, and a lump of fear in my throat. I tried to close those staring white eyes but it was no go. Then I calmed down and called the mate. He was taken worse than I was when he saw it, and said, with his teeth chattering, "There'll be hell to pay for this, man." He looked aft. "The bloody devil!"

We covered the body with a tarpaulin and laid it amidship. Matthews and I calculated not to say anything to the captain, but to let the law take its course. We agreed not to defend the murderer.

The next day we told the men, but one of the Swedes had seen the whole thing and it was common property. We laid Pedro out, uglier a thousand times than he ever was alive, and the men got canvas and needles to



get him ready for his last cruise.

Just at that minute, the captain staggered forward with blood in his eye. One glance at the thing on the deck turned him crazy, and he sprang into the midst of the circle, swearing and raving; and picking the body up, he started to hurl it out over the rail. Strange enough, Pedro's three fingers caught like a hook in the captain's coat. He screamed and struck at them, and then we heard the splash below.

The men stood as if petrified for a second; then they rushed to the side, to find—what we already knew—the corpse was floating. MacDougall had gone aft again, and the crew went about their work with white faces and trembling hands, because sailors know that a ship is cursed if a dead man is given to the fishes without a burial and a shot at his feet.

After that day, MacDougall drank no more. I don't know whether his rum had given out, or whether he was afraid of what he saw when he was drunk; but anyway, he was sober and haggard. He left the handling of the ship to the mate and myself, and kept pretty much to his cabin. When he did go out on deck he seemed uneasy, and kept glancing over his shoulder as if he thought someone was following him. Then he used to

sneak up to Matthews and me and get chummy. He told us stories of phantom ships, and the weird tale of the "Helmsman's Ghost," and asked us if we believed in spirits and the like. I never saw a man change so. He was like a whipped cur.

One night he came on deck, looking even more drawn than usual, and said he was going aloft to let the wind clear his head. After he had clambered up the ratlines, Matthews and I stood talking, speculating on the chances for a good wind.

"From the looks of the moon," he was saying, "I look for a——"

He got no farther. A long shuddering scream grated our very souls. We looked up into the dark mass of canvas overhead; for we knew a man screams like that only once. A whirling black hulk dropped like a stone from the rigging and crashed on the deck with a crunching, grinding sound.

We rushed to it. Yes, it was MacDougall—dead. His face was grey mottled with black, and was twisted into a form that I'll swear was like that death-mask of Pedro's.

I heard a gasp of horror. Matthews was pointing to the dead man's throat with a shaking hand. There, in three distinct black lines, were—the prints of *three fingers*.





# Luke McLuke Says

BY J. SYME HASTINGS

One reason why a girl can act kittenish before she is married is because kittens always grow up.

You can always land a sucker by telling him that he is too smart to bite.

There is hope for our women folks. They may wear freak clothes, but they lost no time in sitting down on the movement to revive the bustle.

It has just about gotten to a stage where a Princess who can play a piano with her feet regards with supreme contempt the common ordinary persons who have to use their hands to manipulate the ivories.

The members of the Hand Holders Union are always in bad with father. In winter they consume too much gas and in summer they consume too much moonlight.

As long as the styles make it necessary to use twice as much goods to a pair of trousers as it does to make a skirt, the girls are going to let the men wear the trousers.

It isn't very hard to keep in touch with the styles. If a girl looks as though she was losing something she is dressed right up to the minute.

When a family consists of a wife, a husband and a poodle, you often have a hard time figuring out which is the dog.

When a girl finds either a pimple or a dimple on her face she will sit up half the night watching it grow.

Lots of girls who don't mind wearing a dirty shirtwaist and a greasy skirt that you can see, wouldn't think

of wearing a combination that you can't see unless it is absolutely clean.

The old-fashioned woman who used to have a pocket in her dress now has a daughter who raises a big bump on the outside of her skirt when she carries a dime in her stocking.

And can-openers were mighty scarce in the old days when a bride thought a cook stove was a dandy wedding present.

Prayer may be good stuff once in while, but the fellow who puts blisters on his hands gets more than the lad who puts blisters on his knees.

Newspaper are great institutions, but why does an editor always manage to find room for a picture of a 10-cent girl who is suing a 15-cent man for \$100,000 for breach of promise?

A man may admit that your wife is handsomer than his, but he will always maintain that his baby and his dog are smarter than yours.

The high cost of living wasn't such a much in the old days when the groceryman used to put a potato on the spout of the oil can for a stopper and a man wasn't afraid to carry an oil can home.

The old-fashioned woman who used to wear a red flannel petticoat, a black alpaca petticoat and a white cotton petticoat now has a daughter who wears a pair of tights and a lace curtain.

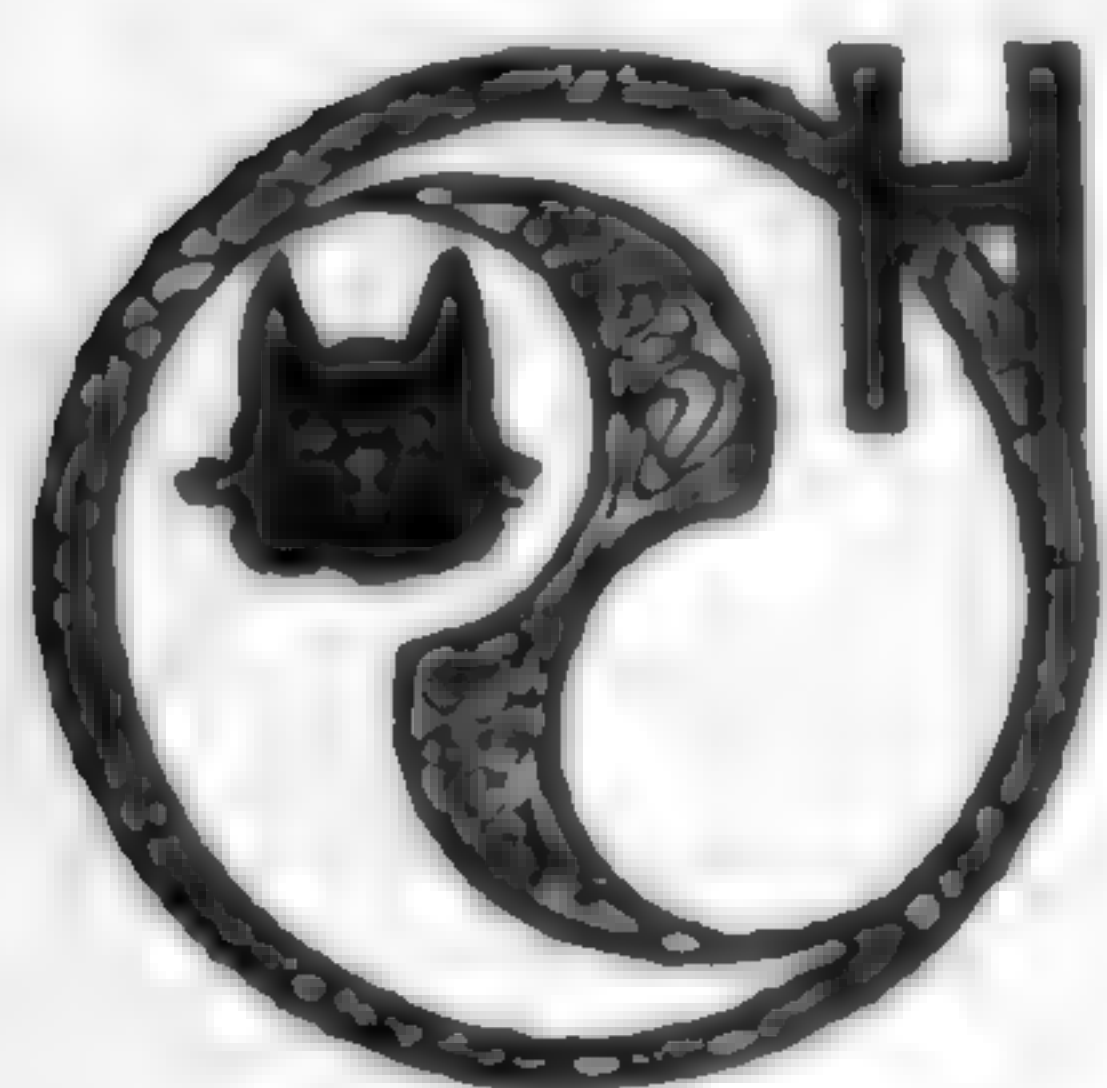
Never tell a corn-fed girl that she is all wool and a yard wide.



# A Fulfilled Mission

BY M. J. NEWMAN

*Here is a new version of the outraged husband. We question if his victim was more surprised than you will be to learn of the punishment he metes out to the man who desecrated his home.*



THIS mission was nearing its end. Here, in this wild and woolly part of the West, land of the rattler and the ghosts of men violently slain, he was at last to meet the man whom he would rather meet than any one who had done him good or evil.

Mason's trip to this gambler-infested Nevada village was not intentional. He had been on his way direct to Frisco, when a friend advised him that Norton had been a resident of H——, Nevada, the past year—a mining engineer with a taste for gambling. Mason spent a couple of days in Salt Lake City, then changed his route.

Unable to sleep, now the sun was throwing its rays full blast into his window, he lay in bed and thought of how Norton had continually crossed his life's path. Ten years before, Mason was in love with Kitty—his one real love; Kitty of the glorious eyes and the figure that would have made Chabas gasp with delight. Mason was in the lead for her hand and heart until Norton came into the game. Then, when the game was ended, Norton, not Mason, was Kitty's husband. Norton was the victor, and Mason had to leave town

for lo, many moons, ere his great, hopeless love would permit his return to the city of his dreadful night.

Then five years passed before Norton's ominous shadow once more darkened his path. Three years before Norton's second advent, Mason had so far put aside his love as to lead Elizabeth to the altar. And with her he lived three years, until Norton came, with his wonderful way with a maid, or a matron, for that matter, and Norton and Elizabeth disappeared. He lost track of them as completely as though the earth had sucked them up.

From his bed he looked out of the window, over the mountains. Here and there was a top covered with snow, although it was midsummer. Some tops were bare. Their sides held great masses of trees to a certain height, then shrubbery further up, until finally came snow. At the base of one of the mountains a river flowed. Here and there, a cabin perched part way up.

He arose from his bed, pulled down the shade, and dressed. Modesty here seemed an uncomfortable pretence, as there were few women in the village. H—— was a headquarters where men, fresh from the ranches and mines, would stop off to buy "store duds" as an outfit before going to Frisco or Los Angeles with their many months of accumulations



to "paint" the town, returning shabby and worn out from return journeys by rail, unsanctioned by the ticket sellers of the railroad, and after a continual game of hide-and-seek with the brakemen. Frequently the lure of the "Palais de Chance" kept them in H——, making their return journey much shorter, as the result was always an empty purse and a splitting head.

Mason put up the shade, put on a clean collar, then took a view of his nearer surroundings. Across the street was the "Palais de Chance," a hostelry where roamed houris whose idea of their mission in life was to separate man from his roll, in competition with the games that ran openly in the "Palace." These ladies with missions in life made their appearance only after eight, these summer days. One would hardly believe that this miserable, dead, pale creature slinking down the street in a wrapper, would in a few hours be metamorphosed into the lovely girl who would be a pal for the evening, or as long as money lasted. Disease and death seemed written on her young-old face—nature's flag proclaiming her one of the pirates of the earth.

But the day was beautiful. Wild flowers were not afraid to grow in the vacant spots between the houses. The flowers and the grass lent a fragrance to the air as it blew across one's face in torrid gusts. The trees on the mountain sides suggested a refreshing shade.

Civilization did its best to make the scene ugly. Bottles and jugs lay even at the side of the main road, telling

of headaches eagerly sought, prodigally bought.

Mason looked at the bottles, at the "Palais de Chance." It was in such surroundings that one might look for a man of Norton's qualities. He was not surprised. He felt that before such a meeting he would do well to eat a hearty meal. He took up his revolver, examined the cartridges, placed it in his pocket, and sauntered down the stairs.

In the shabby dining room, he could see nothing of the man he wished to meet. Neither of the two women eating leisurely at a far end of the room was his wife. Not being much of a woman's man—his experience having soured him—he paid little further attention to them.

The waiter—a burly man who might have served better as a prize fighter or longshoreman—asked him for his order. This was a beefsteak, and it soon came—generous to extravagance, and tasting fresh and pleasant to him who had eaten the "lady's meals" that the dining-car waiters had placed before him. This seemed more of a man's world. He made a leisurely meal, his eyes on the alert, but his expectation of seeing Norton was not gratified.

All men are procrastinators. He felt that, having waited five years to meet this man who had stolen two women from him—one the dearest, the other the nearest—he could wait a few hours longer. He returned to his room and tried to read a magazine, but the heat made him listless, then utterly inattentive, and finally replacing the magazine in his suitcase, he decided to take a stroll.



Obtaining some sandwiches from the waiter, he set out for the mountains. A short cut took him out of the village and onto a dusty road leading thereto. After a hard hour's walk, during which he met no one, he arrived at a spot that promised shade. He looked at his watch. It was nearly one o'clock.

Stretched at full length in the shade of a giant tree, his thoughts recurred to Kitty of the beautiful face and figure. Even today, as through a haze, he could see her, lithe yet with a promise of fullness, a walking poem, leader of the dance and queen of their social circle by reason of her undoubted beauty. He wondered how a rather ugly fellow like Norton could attract such a woman. Norton was not richer than he, nor better educated—in fact, Mason felt sure he could match him in any of the masculine qualities. Then why had Kitty finally chosen Norton? He was puzzling over the problem, old as the world, which will be enacted as long as sex is sex.

Then his thoughts recurred to Elizabeth, who had been his wife. For three years they had lived together. Then Norton had again come into his life, and when he left Chicago for Heaven knows where, Elizabeth had forsaken home and husband to be his companion. What was this man's fascination?

Feeling hungry, he ate his sandwiches, then spent some time looking for a spring. He finally located a small but clean trickle of water and refreshed himself. Then the heat and a full stomach claimed their due and he slept.

He awoke at about seven. It was still light, but he felt that he had better be on his way. Bathing his face in the spring, it refreshed him somewhat and he set out for the village.

Two hours later, refreshed, well-fed, sprucely clad, he stepped into the gaming room of the "Palais de Chance." His revolver was in a pocket convenient for immediate action, if necessary. It had been a constant companion, as in his wanderings of the past few years he had had more than one occasion to draw it.

The gaming room was a typical western gambling place, with its wheels, attendants, and its motley crowd—white men of all nationalities, half-breed Indians, Mexicans, and here and there a woman. Chinamen, inveterate gamblers, indulged in their favorite fan-tan. The Americans seated at the tables seemed to prefer poker.

Mason scanned the room—at first he could not make out his man; then, when about to give up, he felt certain that the man whose back was to him was Norton. He was playing with two Spaniards. Deeply immersed in his cards, he paid no attention as Mason changed his position so as to get a better view of his face. It *was* Norton.

Taking a seat in a secluded corner, Mason waited, considering a plan of action. He decided he would not disclose himself to Norton until he should find him alone. He waited for nearly an hour, when the black-haired Spaniards rose from their chairs, broke. He heard Norton invite them to come for their revenge the following night; then the two filed



out of the room. Ordering a drink, Norton leisurely lit a cigarette and remained at his table.

Mason felt that now was his time. Norton had not yet noticed him. Mason got up and approached his man from the rear; then he tapped him on the shoulder.

The gambler turned negligently in his chair, then a look of fear came into his eyes. His hand sought his pocket, but Mason forestalled him. Mason's revolver was out before Norton could draw, and Norton's hand slid to his side, empty.

"None of that," said Mason. "I can draw a gun a fraction of a second quicker than most men in the West, and that fraction is all I require." He seated himself before Norton and negligently fingered the cards.

Norton seemed fascinated by the sight of the man whose woman he had stolen. His eyes were dilated with fear and his eyelids made slits of his eyes. His stomach seemed to rise in his throat and a lump take its place. He grew hot and then cold, by turns. He recollected the swift justice of the West that meted out punishment and then judged the criminal. He waited, convinced his last minute had come, yet not daring to move.

Mason, after calmly considering, spoke: "Norton, to start with, you and I will play some hands at cards."

Norton was stunned. What new kind of torture was Mason preparing? Where would this lead?

Mason broke in upon his fevered thoughts again: "And, mind, no crookedness. I can detect it instantly. Somehow, I always could

beat you at cards. It's going to be two-handed poker. We want no others in this game."

They were singularly alone. The other players in the room, intent upon their own winnings and losses, had paid no attention to this little byplay.

"Shuffle the cards," commanded Mason; "and no tricks."

"I'll play square, Mason. At last I'll play square with you." Norton dealt out the cards.

The game lasted a half hour, Mason making all suggestions, Norton not daring to contradict him even once. Under the circumstances, the game was entirely in favor of the newcomer, and Mason had "cleaned" Norton out of some nine hundred dollars when the half hour was up. Mason rose to his feet, a look of triumph on his face. Norton sat rigid, his face livid.

Finally, after what seemed to Norton an unendurable period, Mason spoke.

"Norton," he said, "you robbed me of Kitty, my first and only love."

Norton did not dare reply.

"For which I thank you, seeing she proved a woman who spent her husband's last cent on clothes, cards and entertainments far beyond her means.

"Then you robbed me of Elizabeth, my wife, who nagged the deuce out of me, but never gave me legal cause for divorce until then. And now I win nine hundred from you.

"Norton, you've always been my meat. I promised myself, if ever I was in your neighborhood, I'd thank you personally and invite you to have the best in the house. Come over to the bar."



# The Marshal

BY E. S. TUPPER

*We all know the lure of amateur photography, but here's where the hobby saved a man from the net of the law and routed a band of "greasers" with notches in their guns.*



H Beppo! My poor Beppo!"

The man knelt by the horse, tears rolling down his thin cheeks. He pressed the animal's head against his heart in a frenzy of grief. The dying horse looked up at his master with fast glazing eyes filled with almost human love and suffering.

The man sprang to his feet, and wringing his hands, walked to and fro, sobbing as hysterically as a woman. "Oh, my poor Beppo!" he cried, "my poor Beppo!" And then, "Oh, God! what will become of us—what will become of us?"

He was youthful in appearance, scarcely more than a boy; but his face showed the unmistakable ravages of sorrow and fear; altogether, one might say, he was well on the verge of a nervous collapse.

However, he made a desperate effort to pull himself together. Wiping his tears away, and going to a rude shack nearby, where his blankets and harnesses hung, he hastily selected one of the former and returning, laid it tenderly over the dead animal. Then with one anguished look at his pet, he walked unsteadily up the path leading from the corral to the rough little cabin.

At the back of the house was a tiny "lean-to" or shed, in which were stored the tinned meats, and the strings of peppers and onions, with other vegetables which Janet had saved for the winter. There was a wooden table here with a pot or two on it, together with a few beans and potatoes. It was approaching the dinner hour at the lonely little ranch near Douglas, Arizona. Janet had evidently started in her preparations, only to be called suddenly away.

Richard Ward scarce noted these details, but went on through the low doorway into the kitchen, the living room of the place he called home. He saw that here too, in the big sink and on the stove, were some signs of the noontide meal. But what most riveted his attention, was the bottle of whiskey on a table across the kitchen. Going hastily to it, he poured a stiff drink in a tumbler standing there, and tossed it off. The raw liquor burned his throat, and catching up a second glass filled with water, he swallowed the half of it. Then he threw himself into a chair, and bowing his head on his hands, remained moody and abstracted.

Suddenly, Janet, his wife, came backing into the kitchen from a tiny dark pantry in one corner. She was a sweet, fresh-cheeked girl of nineteen, with brown hair rippling about



her pretty head, and honest, hazel eyes, which at that moment were intently fastened on a photographic negative she held up in one hand, while in the other she carried very carefully a small glass about half filled with liquid.

"Look Dick!" she cried excitedly, "look!" Here's the negative I made of the shack this morning. I couldn't do anything until I had finished developing it."

Her husband turned wearily in his chair. "Is it all right?" he idly asked.

"It's fine!" she cried enthusiastically. "Come, look at it."

Richard rose languidly and going around the table, looked at the negative over her shoulder.

"Oh, yes," he muttered, "that's the bum old shack, all right!"

"Oh, Dick dear, don't speak of it like that, don't," she pleaded earnestly. "Remember, it's our home, our—our refuge."

"Refuge—yes," he said sullenly.

"I didn't mean anything, dear boy; you know that, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, Janet, I know," he said tenderly; "I know you, girl, all right."

"Oh, Dick," the girl ran on as if to distract his mind from dismal topics, "you can't imagine what a delight it is to make these negatives. And the little pantry is just an ideal developing room. It was so good of you, dearest, to get the camera for me. I look back and wonder how I lived without it. How did I get through those awful months without any diversion? And oh, by the way, dear, while I think of it, next time you go to Douglas, you must be sure to get me some more cyanide of potas-

sium; that's all I've got now," indicating the glass, "and without my deadly poison I can't develop, you know."

"I don't know," said her husband with a deep sigh, "that I'll ever go to Douglas again."

Janet was startled. "Why, Dick!" she exclaimed, "what do you mean?"

"Oh," cried Richard with sudden desperation, "I've been trying to get up courage to tell you—"

"Dick—what?" she interrupted.

"Poor Beppo died about twenty minutes ago," he finished, with his eyes on the floor.

"Beppo—died;" the girl spoke as if dazed. Slowly she set down the glass of cyanide on the table by the whiskey.

"Yes," went on her husband, never looking at her, "the poor animal's gone. I did all I could for him last night, and this morning he seemed much better. I had great hope of his recovery. But just now, when I went out to the corral, I saw at once he was much worse. I was fussing over him when," his voice shook, "he looked up at me, gave a groan—" He could not finish the sentence.

"Oh, poor Beppo," moaned the girl.

"What I'll do now is beyond me," said Richard. "The walking's not very good between here and Douglas. And there's another thing, Janet, I've got to tell you, and that is, that you must not go out on the trail again alone. Jim Dawson was here just before Beppo died and brought the news that Manuel Estrada's gang is over the border again."

"Manuel Estrada!" Janet's face went white to the lips.

"Yes," replied Richard. "They



killed two cowboys at the Buena Vista Ranch last night."

"Killed? Oh, Dick!"

"Not only that, but they burned the ranch house. They're full of bad whiskey. They'd sell their souls for a dram, you know. God!" he cried in agony, "what if they should pay us a call! And now Beppo's gone, we're absolutely helpless. Oh, why, why did I ever bring you to this barbarous country?" He wrung his hands helplessly.

"Dick dearest," said the girl calmly, "don't worry. We're in God's hands. I'm not afraid of those beasts. And if the worst comes, it's better, far better for us to go together, than—that you should die, alone, back there."

"Hands up!"

The husband and wife turned slowly, like automatons. In the doorway to the shed stood a man pointing a revolver at Richard. He was about forty, powerfully built, with a weather-beaten face, piercing grey eyes under a thick shock of dark brown hair, lightly touched with silver. He was dressed in khaki, with boots laced to his knees. On his head was a broad-brimmed felt hat, set well back from a seamed, sun-burned forehead.

"Hands up!" he repeated, as he swaggered into the room with a devil-may-care air. It was quite evident from his manner, that he had been drinking. He was by no means intoxicated, but was, in the picturesque language of that locality, slightly "lit-up."

Janet dropped the negative from her trembling hands to the floor, where it shivered into a thousand pieces. The intruder paused at the

sound, and removing his hat, bowed with awkward gallantry. "Excuse me ma'am," he said, "I didn't know that there were ladies present."

"What do you want?" demanded Richard.

"You," promptly responded the visitor.

"Who are you?"

"Steve Blount—marshal, Douglas. Got a warrant;" he fumbled in his pocket and produced the paper. "Here it is. Warrant for Richard Ward. Reckon you're it, ain't you?"

"On what charge?" came from the white lips.

"Fer doin' a fellow, Joe Grant, in Worcester, Mass., a year ago," replied the marshal.

"Oh, Dick, Dick!" burst out Janet in agony.

"It's too bad, ma'am," said Steve with clumsy sympathy, "I'm awful sorry. But I was sent here to get him and he'll have to go to Douglas along with me."

"All right, I'll get ready," said Richard mechanically, as he started to leave the room.

"Hold on, young feller; you stop right whar you are!" admonished the marshal. "Let the lady git your things. And please hurry, ma'am; we got to get right off."

Like one moving in an evil dream, Janet slowly crossed the room to their tiny chamber to prepare her husband's bag. It had come then—the blow they had feared for months. The girl could not think; she mechanically placed a few necessities in a bag, and then stood for a moment, staring about, like one suddenly bereft of reason. Her eyes rested on



her husband's revolver lying on the packing box from which she had contrived a tiny dresser. She picked it up, looked at it, saw that it was loaded, and put it in her husband's grip.

Out in the living room, the marshal crossed to his prisoner: "Got a gun?" he tersely asked.

"No."

"Wall, I can't take no chances," Steve retorted. He quickly and deftly searched Richard. "All right," he added, "set down." Richard sank back in the chair by the table and buried his head on his arms.

"Oh, come son, buck up!" said the marshal not unkindly. Then his eyes fell on the whiskey bottle. He smiled—a radiant, cheerful, hopeful smile. He picked up the glass of water. "Shucks,—water!" he said in disgust. He threw the water in the sink, poured himself a dram from the bottle, tossed it off, then picked up the other glass, under the impression that it too, held water. As he carried it toward his lips, Janet came into the room with Richard's grip.

"Stop—stop!" she screamed. She threw the bag on a chair, rushed over to Steve, who had turned in amazement at her voice, and snatched the glass from him. "In Heaven's name!" she gasped.

"What's the matter?" asked Steve a bit unsteadily.

"It's poison," panted the girl, "deadly poison!"

"Poison!—hell!"

"Yes, cyanide of potassium;" Janet hurriedly explained. "I use it in my photography. I'd cut the developer with it and set it down there, just before you came. You would have

been stone dead in five minutes."

Steve drew a long breath. "In five minutes—in five—" he broke off.

For a moment he regarded the pale, slender girl before him with a strange expression. "Wall, ma'am," he said at length, "I've faced death a good many times, but that's about the closest call I've ever had. So I owe you my life." He paused and studied her face again. "But what fazes me is—why didn't you let me drink it? Then your husband could have skipped out."

"I'm not a murderer," replied Janet, with fine scorn, nor is my husband. Although he killed Joe Grant, he did it to defend me, just as you would have defended your wife."

"Sho' now, is that it?" inquired the marshal, with genuine commiseration in his voice. "Wall, wall, I'm plumb sorry to be mixed up in this here business; that's what I am. But," he added firmly, "I got to take him. He'll have to go 'long with me."

"Oh, he'll go," responded Janet bitterly, "and so will I." She picked up a long cloak lying on a chair.

"Got a horse?" asked Steve laconically, of Richard.

"My horse died this morning," Richard answered, with a lump in his throat, as he thought of the beautiful animal he had loved, lying out in the corral under the blanket. He couldn't even bury him now.

"I've got two," returned Steve. "I'll give your wife one, and you'll ride with me." Something jingled in his pocket; he lifted out a pair of handcuffs; Richard turned ashen.

As Janet threw her cloak about her, she saw the shattered negative on the



floor at her feet. With housewifely instinct, she bent and lifted the pieces. Going up to the window, from which she had not drawn the curtain that morning, she pushed it aside and threw out the pieces of glass. Suddenly, she recoiled, dropped the glass again on the floor, hastily drew the curtain, and rushing to the door leading to the shed, shut it and dropped the great wooden bar across it. In another instant, Steve, dropping the handcuffs back in his pocket, whipped out a second revolver, and covering both husband and wife, cried out sternly, "Here, what kind of a game is this?"

"Mexicans!" whispered the girl, pointing to the window.

"Mexicans? Shucks!" returned Steve contemptuously.

"Look for yourself," said Janet. "I saw two wriggling through the brush, just back of the corral."

For a moment, Steve looked at her as if he would read her soul. Then slowly backing to the window and lifting a corner of the curtain, he peered out. Instantly, he wheeled. "Greasers! by God!" he ejaculated.

He shoved both revolvers into his belt and rushed for the sink, where a bucket of water was standing. He doused the water over his face and head. Instantly sobered, he was changed from a swaggering, half-tipsy chap, into a cool, resourceful leader. "Ward," he said tensely, "get your gun, quick."

Janet hurriedly opened Richard's grip, and taking out the revolver, handed it to her husband. "Wall, I'll be durned!" said the marshal to himself; "so the little lady had it all

ready." Then aloud to Janet, "Can you shoot?"

"Yes," said the girl calmly.

"You'll do," rejoined Steve, as he handed her one of his revolvers. "There are five of them—five against three. I'll take the first one that gets in, and you, the next, Ward; then ma'am, you try for the third. Then right on, the same way, till our ammunition's gone." For an instant he paused, then added with sinister emphasis, "You keep a bullet for yourself, ma'am."

"Stand here, Ward,"—he indicated the spot,—“and you, ma'am, right there. Try not to waste a bullet. It's Estrada's gang. I know 'em." His eyes rested on the whiskey bottle. "Here," he said, "I've got to have one swig, then I'm ready for 'em."

He went over to the table, lifted the bottle, paused, and set it down again. Then he smiled—a slow, grim smile. "Quick," he said turning to Janet, "get three glasses. No questions,—quick." Janet rushed to the dresser and brought out the glasses. She was horrified to see Steve pouring the poison into the whiskey. "What—what are you going to do?" she gasped.

"I used to keep a saloon in Tombstone," Steve coolly replied. "This here is a nice Tombstone toddy I'm a-mixin' fer them greasers."

"Oh, you surely wouldn't kill them like that!" she recoiled from him in terror.

"Wouldn't I?" rejoined Steve quietly, "as quick as I would a rattlesnake. You don't know what you're up against. They're wuss'n Apaches."



He strode up to the window, the bottle in his hand. "They're still in the brush," he muttered. "They've seen my horses. They don't know how many of us are here. They're playin' a waitin' game,—standin' pat. Wall, I'll call 'em!"

Crossing to the shed door, he softly unbarred it. Placing the whiskey on the table in the shed, he beckoned to Richard. "The glasses, Ward, the glasses, quick!" Richard hastily handed them to Steve, who placed them in tempting array by the bottle, then closed and re-barred the door, slamming his huge shoulder against it. Revolver in hand, he waited.

A tense silence settled down upon the room. The three stood like statues, listening—for what? Then past the window nearest the corral, stole the five Mexicans, their silver-laced sombreros and wicked faces showing just above the sill. The silent listeners heard them enter the shed, heard a low murmur and tinkling of glasses. Some one of the gang laughed insolently. Then ensued another brief silence. "They are drinking it now," ran like lightning through Janet's consciousness. She bit her lips until the blood came, to keep from screaming.

And now a frightful medley of groans, shrieks and curses, smote upon the listening room. Then once more, silence—sudden—awful! The nerve-racked watchers dared not meet each other's glances. Their hearts pounded like hammers in their ears; their blood retreating, left them cold as death itself. The interminable moment—an eternity—went by.

"Has—anyone—passed—the win-

dow?" Steve breathed, rather than spoke, the question.

"No," whispered Richard.

"Then, by George!" thundered the marshal, "we've raked in the jack pot! Be ready now. I'm goin' to open the door." He stealthily unbarred the door and peered out, then quickly closed it.

"Done to a turn!" he cried with atrocious gaiety. He strode over to Richard and held out his hand. "Put her thar, pardner!" he said.

Richard looked at him in wonderment, then gave him his hand. The marshal put his other hand on his prisoner's shoulder. "Now you two git out 's quick 's you can. Take my horses and ride like the devil over into New Mexico. Make fer El Paso, an'——"

"But—but—I don't understand," Richard stammered. "Aren't you going to arrest me?"

"Arrest nuthin'!" roared Steve; "this hain't my day fer arrestin'."

Janet burst into tears and threw herself into a chair, sobbing violently.

"Thar now," cried the marshal, "see what you've done! Made the gamest little lady I ever run up against, break down. Ain't you ashamed of yourself? Come, git a move on ye!"

"But—what will you do?" Richard began. "How'll you get back to Douglas?"

"Oh, Lord, you make me tired!" groaned Steve. "You're the slowest fugitive I ever chased. Why, man, I know this country like a jack rabbit. I'll walk; I need the exercise. I'm a-gettin' too durned fat."

"But—how'll you explain about—about me, and your horses?"



"Why, you got clean away, don't you see? And greasers chased me and shot my horses. Which is some true, an' some lyin'," replied Steve with a wink.

"What,—what'll you do about—about them?" Richard asked, pointing to the shed.

"Oh," said Steve airily, "you can leave that to me. I'll clean up the muss."

"I can't do it—it's no use. I can't go and leave you like this." Richard turned away, shaking his head. "It's too cowardly."

"Oh, shut up!" cried the marshal good-humoredly. "You shorely do get on my nerves. An' the doctor tellin' me all the time I mustn't be crossed in anything. Come, boy," he continued, laying his hand kindly on Richard's shoulder, "don't waste no more time. You got to git the girl away before any more of them devils come. Got any money?"

"Well," said Richard, with a sad little smile, "not much."

"Here!" Steve thrust a roll of bills into his hand.

"Oh, God bless you! God bless you!" Richard managed to say as he looked down in dazed fashion at the yellow-backs.

"I hope He will. He knows I need it," rejoined Steve, as he picked up Janet's cloak and gently put it around her. "Come ma'am, you must go now."

The girl rose, still softly weeping. Her husband put his arm about her and led her gently toward the door. "Not that way—you jack——" suddenly cried Steve, interposing his big

body between them and the shed door; "go out the other way. 'Tain't a nice sight for a lady."

Suddenly Janet broke from Richard's sustaining arm, and snatching Steve's big fist in her hand, bent and kissed it. The marshal was frightfully embarrassed; "Why, why, ma'am," he stammered, getting very red in the face, "don't now—don't,—you'll make me—swell up like a turkey gobbler."

"God bless you—you—you good man!" sobbed the girl.

"Oh, yes," returned the marshal, with irony, "I'm good. I'm a plumb nice upright citizen, I am."

"I shall never forget you—" Janet's tears were falling on his hand—"I—I shall always pray for you. Good-bye, goodbye!" and they were gone.

Steve, leaning from the window, watched them as they mounted his horses and waved farewell. "Hit the trail lively now!" he cried. "So long! Good luck!"

A rush, a pounding of hoofs, and the forest enclosed them. The marshal stood for a moment, regarding his hand, moist yet from the girl's tears. "She—she kissed me," he said gravely—"the first kiss I've had from a straight woman since my mother died. 'I shall never forget you—I shall always pray for you!'"

Slowly he lifted his hand to his lips and pressed it where Janet's kiss had burned. Then, yawning and stretching his brawny arms, he sauntered lazily to the shed door. "Wall," he said, thoughtfully, "before I start fer Douglas, I 'low I'll go out and plant them thar greasers."



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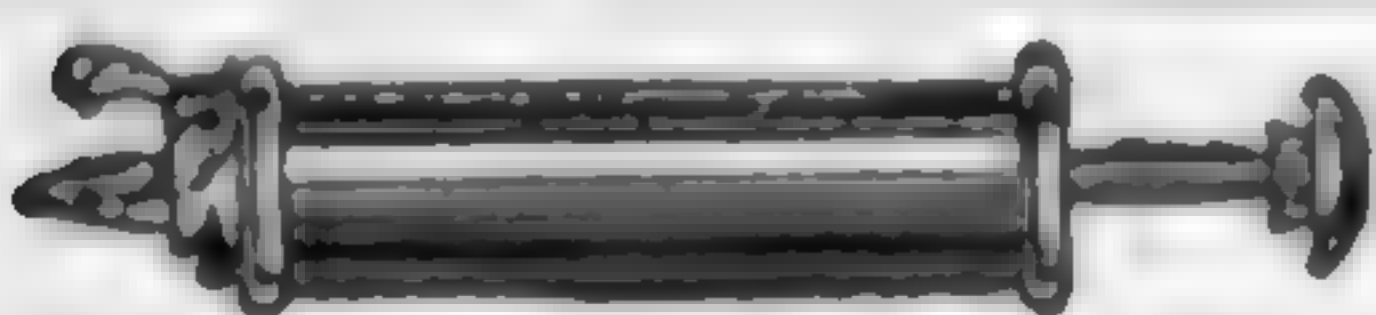
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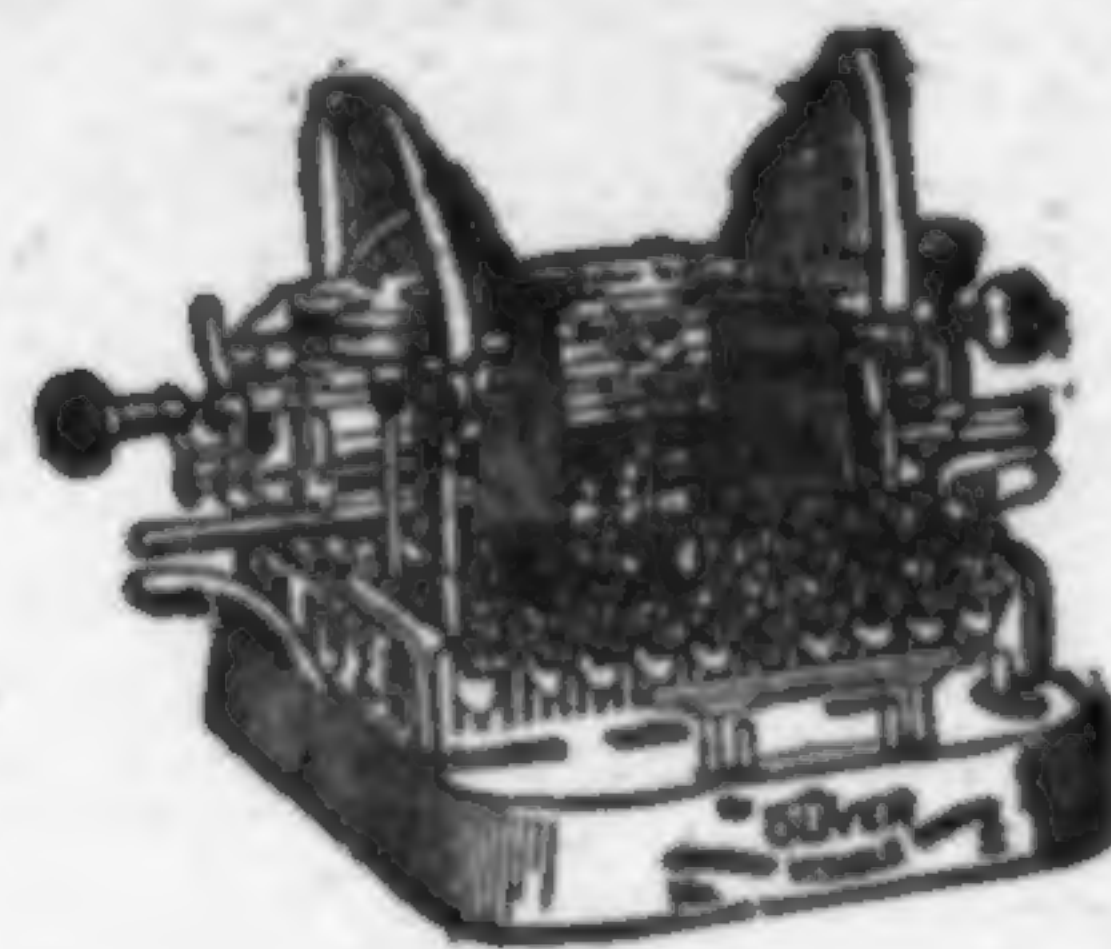
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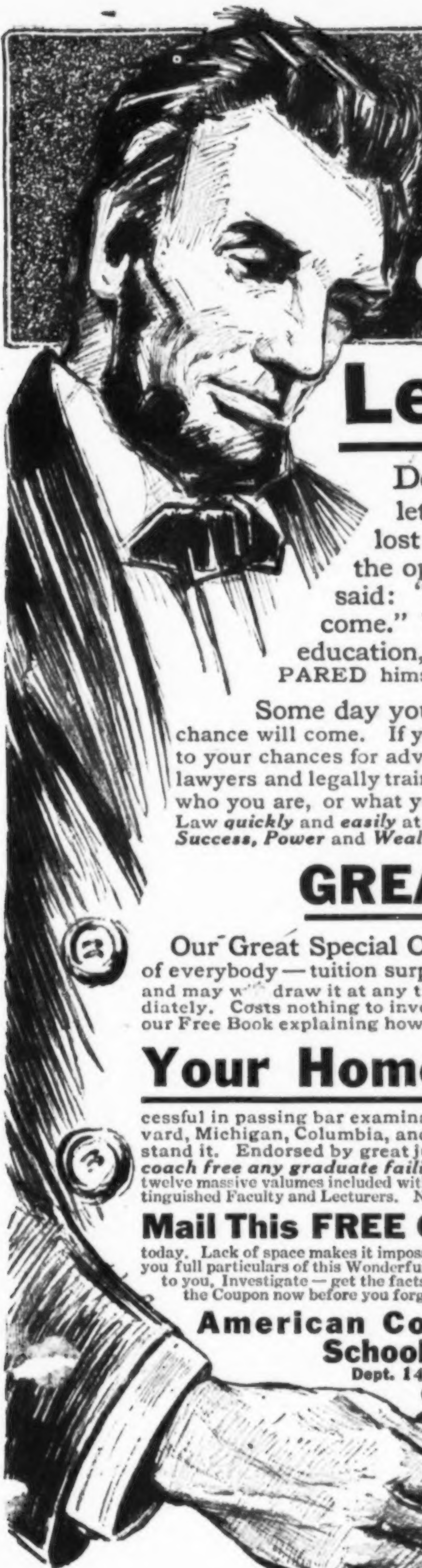
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